Starting Out In Village Schools: Learning To Teach In Lao PDR

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Starting Out In Village Schools: Learning To Teach In Lao PDR

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DECLARATION

I, Michele Willsher, declare that:

This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for any other academic award. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work and the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of my approved research program. Any editorial work carried out by a third party has been acknowledged; and, RMIT University ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed as appropriate.

	23 March 2013
Signature	Date

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Lenny Willsher,
and to my mother, Christine Willsher, who throughout life have
shared with me their wisdom, their humour and always their love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Lao PDR ...

At the centre of this study are four beginning teachers who welcomed me into their homes and schools and villages. Their experience of becoming teachers provides the core around which this thesis is built. I am indebted to them and to their families for the welcome they extended and the trust they placed in me. To each of them I express my deepest thanks.

Within the Ministry of Education, my thanks are due to Madame Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun, the Vice-Minister of Education, who approved my proposal, gave me official permission to visit rural village schools and who supported and encouraged me in my studies. Others in the Ministry of Education are also recognised for their support – Mrs Varadune Amarathithada and Dr Mithong Souvanvixay. My sincere thanks also go to Mr Khampiene Mekchone, the Director of the Pakse Teachers College, who welcomed me back no longer as an 'advisor' but as a 'researcher'. He provided college accommodation, office space and of critical importance, agreed to let one of his staff members, Ms Sivilay Phommachanh, work with me as a research assistant.

It is hard to convey how much I owe to Sivilay for agreeing to accompany me for a year and 'live a rural life'. Together we experienced the energy and excitement of Lao festivals. We also sat through hundreds of lessons, conducted interviews that went on forever, and worked late into the night transcribing and translating. We cooked and ate and slept in the homes of the families of the four young teachers and shared our perspectives on life with them. And maybe this was all meant for a reason, as it was in the third village we visited that Sivilay met her husband and has since given birth to a beautiful healthy boy.

The idea for this research developed in a small coffee shop at the back of the Teacher Training College in Pakse. It was here that I talked with my colleagues and friends Somxay Thepsombath and Sourichanh Thammavongseng about my ideas and they provided suggestions on how to straddle the cultural differences between my 'western' ways of doing things and the ways of the Lao. Their guidance, support and encouragement throughout the fieldwork was invaluable and I thank them both.

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And in Australia…

My thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Dianne Siemon, who from the start of this journey was highly encouraging and supportive. Di, who read my drafts and provided meticulous feedback proved to be just the kind of supervisor I needed. Thank you.

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And to my parents: to Lenny Willsher, who jokingly started to ask just after my first year, *"Have you finished yet?"* and I would calmly answer *"Not yet!"* It was a joke we shared which kept me sane - but often asked at times when the whole enterprise seemed impossible. Lenny passed away a year ago, but this thesis answers his question. Finally, to my mother, Christine, for encouraging me to journey to other places and learn about other lives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADEA	African Development Education Agency
ALACT	Action Looking Awareness Creating Trial
APHEDA	Australian People for Health, Education, and Development Abroad
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BT	Beginning Teachers
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
DAP	Discretionary Aid Program
DEB	District Education Bureau
DfID	Department for International Development
DGE	Department of General Education
DoP	Department of Personnel
DPPE	Department of Preschool and Primary Education
DTE	Department of Teacher Education
DTT	Department of Teacher Training
EFA	Education For All
EFA-FTI	Education For All - Fast Track Initiative
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQIP I	First Education Quality Improvement Program
EQIP II	Second Education Quality Improvement Program
ESDF	Education Sector Development Framework
ESQAC	Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FoE	Faculty of Education
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GoL	Government of Lao
LABEP	Lao Australian Basic Education Program
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LCE	Learner-Centred Education
LFNC	Lao Front for National Construction
LL	Lao Language
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sport
MUSTER	Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project
NCTC	National Charter of Teacher Competencies
NEM	New Economic Mechanism
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NESRS	National Education System Reform Strategy
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy

NREIS	National Research Institute for Educational Sciences
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
NUOL	National University of Laos
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PA	Pedagogical Advisor
PES	Provincial Education Service
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RGL	Royal Government of Lao
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SEA	South East Asian
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SREAC	Strategy Research and Education Analysis Centre
STR	Student Teacher Ratio
TEADC	Teacher Education and Administrator Development Centre
TEI	Teacher Education Institute
TESAP	Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan
TESSA	Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa Project
TTC	Teacher Training College
TTEST	Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers
TTS	Teacher Training School
TUP	Teacher Upgrading Program
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCROC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VC	Village Committee
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee
VSO	Volunteer Service Overseas
WAU	World Around Us
WB	World Bank
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All

NOTES ON STYLE AND LANGUAGE

(i) The country in which this study is set is *Sathalanalat Paxathipatai Paxaxon Lao*, officially the Lao People's Democratic Republic, commonly abbreviated to the Lao PDR. The country is also spoken of informally as 'Laos'. The third and fourth of these terms are used at various times in this study. As a noun, *Lao* is the language spoken by the ethnic Lao people. 'Lao' is also used as an adjective, as in 'Lao history' and 'Lao culture'.

(ii) The people among whom the study is set are the ethnic Lao, also referred to as *Lao Loum* or Lowland Lao. They comprise 55% of the population of the Lao PDR, and in a country of 49 officially recognised ethno-linguistic groups, are the dominant group numerically, socially, economically and politically.

(iii) The transliteration of Lao script into English presents problems. There is as yet little agreement on the spelling of many words (Pakse or Pakxe? Salavanh or Saravan?) and no standard orthography. The spelling used here derives from usage common within the Foreign Language Department at the Pakse Teacher Training College.

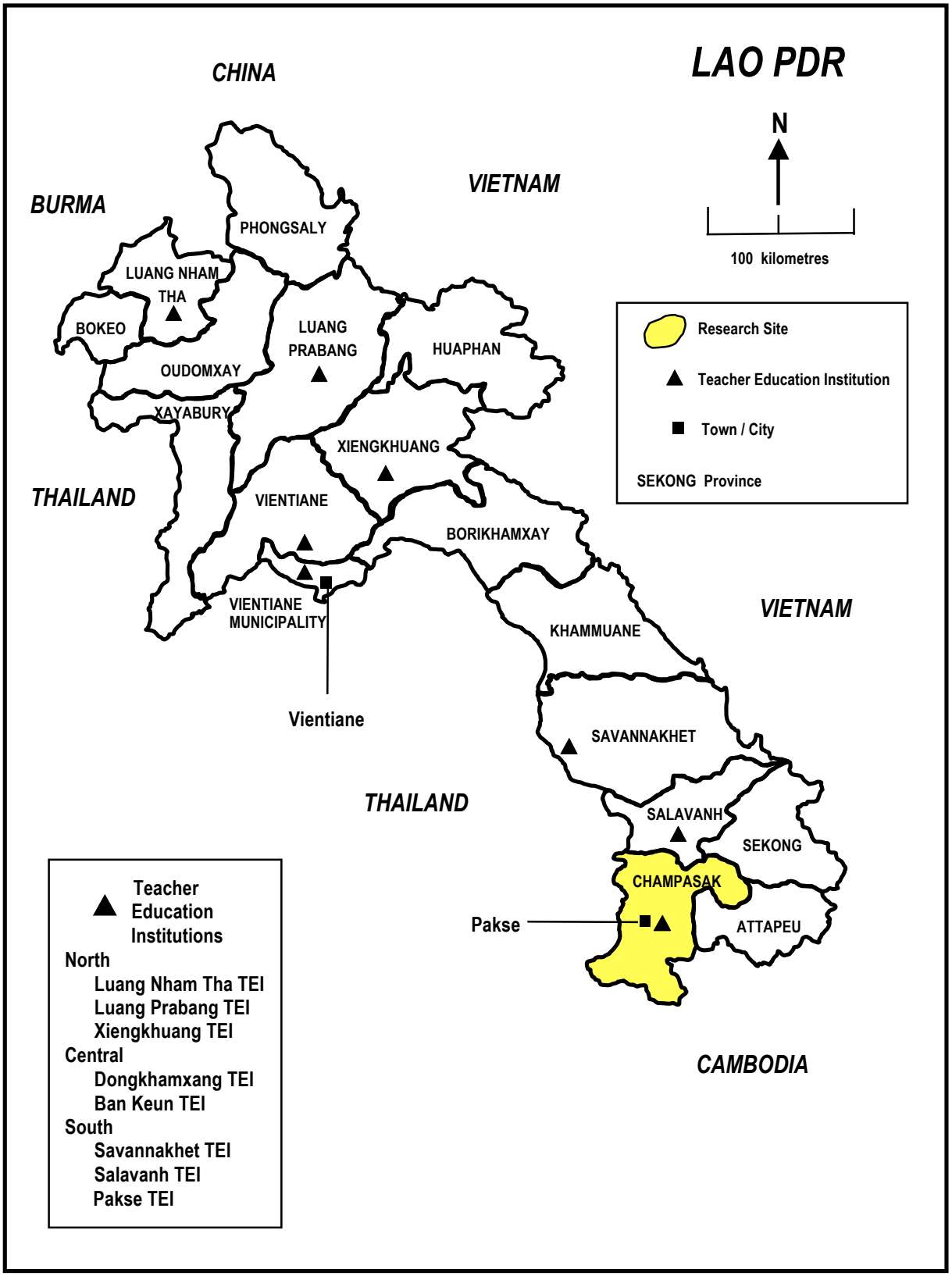
(iv) All foreign words, whether *Lao* or otherwise, are italicised.

(v) Direct quotes from interviews are italicised and referenced using as a standard format: (Speaker's name: Visit X. Interview Y). In the case of the beginning teachers who are the primary source of quotes, there were up to five interviews during any one visit.

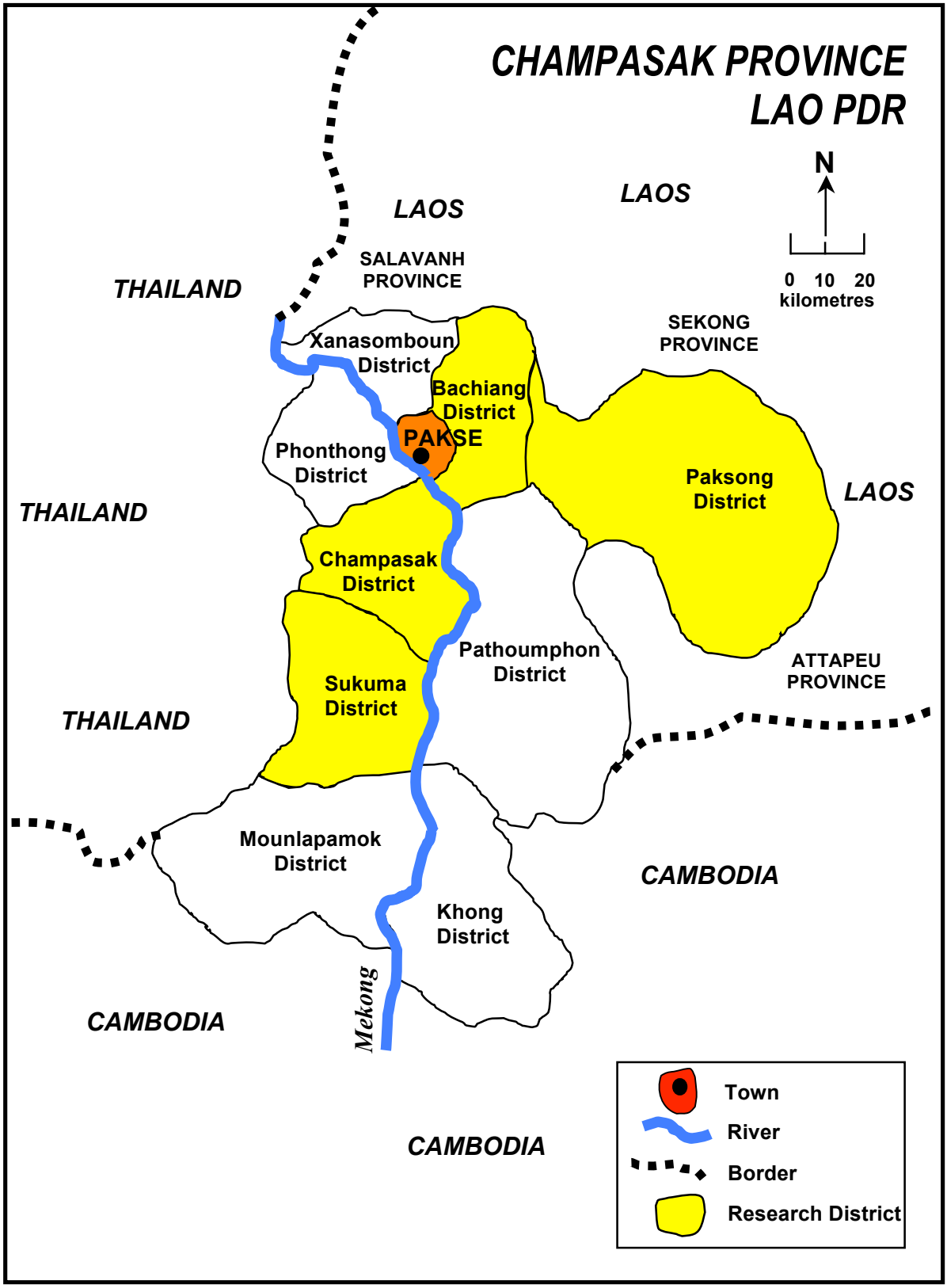
(vi) A number of official documents accessed and referenced in the thesis were only available in Lao. I am indebted to the following people for the many hours they ungrudgingly put in translating documents: Mrs Daravan Phonekeo, Mr Sourichanh Thammavongseng, Dr Daravone Kittiphanh, Mr Somxay Inthasone, Ms Kathryn Sweet, Mr Vantheva Vongsy, Ms Lamxe Liamsithisack and Mr Bounmark Tyhaphannonth.

(vii) Because of the confidential nature of some of the issues discussed in this thesis, neither the real names of the beginning teachers nor the real names of their villages have been used.

MAP 1: Lao PDR showing Provinces and Locations of Teacher Education Institutions



MAP 2: Champasak Province, Lao PDR showing the four Districts where the research was undertaken



ABSTRACT

Laos is a small country in South East Asia surrounded by larger and more powerful neighbours – China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma. It has a 20th century history of colonisation, of war, and in 1975, of revolution, when the Royalist government was overthrown and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established. In economic terms it is perhaps the poorest country in the region with limited infrastructure and minimal social services such as health and education. But it is also a country of great natural beauty, of extraordinary ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, and of largely un-spoilt charm and vibrancy. It is in villages and schools in rural areas in Champasak Province in the south of Laos that the study is set.

This is an ethnographic study which examines how four young teachers working in rural primary schools began their teaching careers. As such it is the first piece of research in Laos focused on the everyday work of beginning teachers. The study provides a contextualized account of the professional experiences of the teachers and highlights the social and cultural conditions that impacted upon them as they struggled to come to grips with the realities of the school and the classroom. The research investigates the manner in which their experiences of teaching influenced their evolving practices and considers how, and to what extent, they were able to adjust to their new roles.

Over an 18-month period of fieldwork, observations were undertaken and interviews conducted and then used as the primary research methods to construct the case studies. An initial period of six months was spent at the Pakse Teachers' Training College (TTC) in Champasak Province 'following' a cohort of trainee-teachers over the concluding half of their one-year teacher training diploma course. Four of these trainees, now beginning teachers, participated for a further twelve months in the study. During this time the researcher made a series of week-long visits to the four different villages where the teachers had been posted. In total, 155 lessons were formally observed during the visits, 121 semi-structured interviews conducted and extensive journal notes kept of informal observations and conversations.

An analysis of the data found that the four beginning teachers each experienced similar pressures from their colleagues to conform to the established patterns and behaviours in their respective schools. In effect, the school as a 'community of practice', with all its potential for nurture and guidance, operated as a 'community of compliance'.

The professional struggles which each of the beginning teachers encountered over their first year, are encapsulated in the study as five 'dilemmas' - whether or not to respond to requests from colleagues for help; whether to report student progress accurately or not; whether to seek professional help from colleagues or whether to remain silent; whether to employ learner-centred methods or whether to keep to 'traditional' methods; and whether to respond to the students' learning needs or just simply teach to the textbook like everyone else. The four beginning teachers, unpaid 'volunteers' with no job security, had little resilience when faced with such choices.

To resolve these dilemmas and maintain social harmony the four beginning teachers each typically adopted the strategy of 'compliance' with the dominant practices. However, at times they also adopted a strategy of 'compromise' as they struggled to find ways to assist their students to learn.

Through the study the professional needs of beginning teachers in small rural primary schools in Laos have been identified. Outcomes of the study are two sets of recommendations for improving the quality of teacher education in Laos, grounded in the social and cultural contexts of the schools where the beginning teachers worked. The first set of recommendations are directed at reconfiguring TTC pre-service programs while the second set puts forward ideas for developing a beginning teacher workplace support program.

It is hoped that the information provided through this study on the professional experiences of beginning teachers, together with the recommendations, will be of help to donors and to the policy makers responsible for teacher education in Laos. As the country embarks on a program of educational reform, tapping into the enormous potential of its young beginning teachers will be a major challenge, but one that the country can ill afford to lose.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: FRAMING THE RESEARCH

> *No country should borrow its concept of education from another country; it is incumbent on each country to think out its own problems and find appropriate solutions. The first step towards the development of education must necessarily be a national effort of reflection on education.*
>
> Khampao Phonekeo, 1975, p. 94

Preamble

In April 2003 I arrived in southern Laos to work for an international aid project[1] as a teacher training 'specialist' based at the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC)[2] in Champasak province. The job required that I support both the Pakse TTC and two other colleges located in the neighbouring provinces of Salavanh and Savannakhet (see Map 1). Over a three-year period the position provided me with a unique opportunity to work closely with college administrators and educators helping them establish professional development programs.

And so it was, a few weeks after I commenced work in Laos, that I found myself in a tightly packed 4WD Toyota accompanying ten Lao lecturers from the Pakse TTC on a 'fact-finding mission' to the remote districts of the province. We were off to observe 'the real situation' in schools like those where the large majority of the graduates from the college were posted each year to teach. It was the start of the wet season, and as we bumped along a narrow dirt track I began to worry about how much more rain it would take before the track disappeared altogether. We were scheduled to visit five schools and in each case it had been necessary to obtain permission to visit from the relevant District Education Bureau (DEB) who sent their own representative along to keep an eye on the visitors, especially since one of them was a *falang* - a foreigner.

The first school was in a remote rural village in the hills on the way towards the border with Vietnam. After introductions in the playground we divided up into five groups and each group observed a lesson delivered by a different nervous teacher. All lessons came straight from the textbook and the students chanted their answers in rehearsed unison. At the end of an

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1 This technical advisory position was located within the Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers (TTEST) project funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and was a component of the larger Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP II) funded by the Government of Lao (GoL), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

2 Since 2010 Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) and Teacher Training Schools (TTS) have been collectively called Teacher Education Institutions (TEI). In this thesis "TTC" is used when referring to the training college in Pakse and "TEI" when referring more generically to training institutions in Laos, especially since 2010. See also Chapter 1, Footnote 35.

hour we met again with the teachers back out in the playground; however, all deferred to the principal and the DEB representative as they held forth on the school and its merits. At each school we observed some teaching, but the opportunity to engage in any in-depth dialogue with the teachers never seemed to eventuate. Not only was time limited, but these teachers appeared quite shy and mostly stood back letting the principal or the DEB representative give us the formal descriptions of the school and its statistics.

That the school buildings were absolutely basic was patently obvious, with some being little more than lean-to shelters and even where they were more substantial, there was still an almost total lack of resources. As I discovered later, the schools had no operational funds and new teachers worked as 'volunteers' with no regular salary and no guarantee of on-going employment.[3] Yet teaching, I was told, despite its difficulties, was a high-status position in the rural villages where people struggled to survive. It was then, as I started to wonder about the relevance of the pre-service course I had been employed to support, that this study had its genesis. How well did the course prepare its graduates for the realities of these rural classrooms? What were the professional needs of these graduates once they arrived in the schools with their fresh new diplomas?

Over the years following that initial encounter I visited many more schools in rural areas and 'talked education' with many more Lao educators as well as with a stream of people like myself – 'foreign experts' - many of whom, like me, often seemed ignorant of what went on day-by-day in classrooms across the country.

In 2006 I was reassigned to work in the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Vientiane and for another three years gave professional support to selected staff in the eight Lao Teacher Training Colleges/Schools (TTC/TTS) across the country and in nine of the seventeen Provincial Education Services (PES).[4] These staff had been charged with delivering an in-service training program for over half of the 27,586 primary school teachers in Laos at that time.[5] At the end of 2008 when the position finished I conducted an audit for UNICEF and the MoE of the in-service training available for primary school teachers in Laos. Major

[3] Beginning teachers are also referred to as 'volunteer' or 'contract' teachers and receive no salary until they are made permanent employees of a Provincial Education Service, a process that typically takes up to four years. During this waiting period the beginning teacher is reliant upon his or her own family or on the local community to provide material support. See also Section 5.2.2.

[4] The nine provinces which received funding under TTEST were Champasak, Salavanh, Savannakhet, Vientiane, Oudomxay, Luang Nham Tha, Luang Prabang, Xiengkhuang, and Xayabury.

[5] See Annual Bulletin 2004-2005 (MoE, 2005c).

findings from the audit included that in-service training for primary teachers was "*fragmented*" and that there were no programs available to support beginning teachers.

During this time the MoE released its first *Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan.* When I read the document I saw what I believed were areas which needed to be researched before the *Strategy* could be fully implemented. And so in late 2008, at the conclusion of my contract, I approached the Vice-Minister of Education for permission to undertake private research into the training and professional needs of beginning teachers in Laos. After discussion and consideration my proposal was approved, and with the personal support of the Vice-Minister the study became possible and my own private *odyssey* began. A research proposal was written, my doctoral candidacy approved, a supervisor recruited, and soon my supportive family were waving me off as I left Vientiane for the villages of Champasak.

On that first visit to a Lao school in 2003 I had wished that I could sit down with the teachers and hear from them about their experiences and their concerns. I no longer needed to wish. Over the course of eighteen months of fieldwork undertaken in 2009-2010, I sat in on lectures and seminars in a provincial teacher training college, visited remote villages and saw the way of life at close quarters, observed teachers at work in classrooms in rural primary schools, and above all else, listened to the hopes, aspirations and concerns of four young beginning teachers. In their villages, where they welcomed me into their world, I was now 'the learner'. This study tells their story – the story of four beginning teachers starting out in village schools.

1.0 Introduction

This study examines the professional experiences and teaching practices of four beginning teachers in Lao PDR during their first year of teaching in a rural primary school. It examines their 'lived' experience using an ethnographic case study approach which allowed for direct observations of teaching. The approach also made possible the identification and analysis of factors which either assisted or constrained the evolving practices of the beginning teachers and their opportunities to learn the craft of teaching. While the Lao *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (206-2010)* (MoE, 2006a) includes proposals to support beginning teachers, at the time of writing no formalised programs have been established in this area. Outcomes of the study are the identification of the professional needs of beginning teachers in Laos together with recommendations for improving pre-service education and establishing workplace support (see Chapter 8). It is envisaged that the study will be of help to educators responsible for teacher education reform.

Section 1.1 of the chapter gives an overview of the Lao PDR and situates the study; Section 1.2 introduces four research questions, explains the location for the study, gives a summary of the research approach and provides some brief comments on the limitations and applicability of the study; and Section 1.3 explains the organisation of the thesis.

1.1 Country Context[6]

This section situates the study by providing a description of Laos, or more formally the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), its people and its system of governance. It sketches out a history of Laos, touches on the topic of international aid and provides an outline of relevant aspects the education system.[7]

1.1.1 Demographics, geography, ethnicity and religion

Laos is a small land-locked country sharing borders with China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma (See Map 1). At 6.2 million people, Laos has the smallest population of any country in South-East Asia, and along with Cambodia, the least developed infrastructure, economy and education system.

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6 Unless otherwise indicated statistics quoted in Section 1.1 derive from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO, 2011); World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2012); or, 2005 Lao National Population Census (GoL, 2005).

7 The Lao education system is discussed in Appendix 2.

A substantial majority of the people[8] (73%) live in rural villages scattered across the fertile flood plains of the Mekong River and its tributaries and up in the more sparsely populated mountainous regions that run along its eastern border with Vietnam. While the economy of the country is dominated by agriculture, only 10% of the land is arable. The rugged terrain also presents challenges to authorities trying to establish and maintain communications, roads, health services and schools.

The 2005 census confirmed that Laos is a land of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Overall there are forty-nine officially recognised ethno-linguistic groups[9] who have a wide diversity of cultures and languages. Ethnic Lao make up about 55% of the population and predominantly live in low-land areas farming wet-land rice. Many of the minority peoples live in marginal upland areas reliant on slash-and-burn agriculture and dry rice farming.

The dominant religion in Laos is *Theravada* Buddhism with 67% of the population following its beliefs and practices and with every ethnic Lao village having a *vat* (a Buddhist monastery) at its religious, cultural and communal centre. Other ethnic groups are free to follow their own beliefs and traditions. In 1975, immediately after the Lao Revolution and the proclamation of the Lao PDR, there was an attempt by the new government to ban Buddhist festivals and to control the monasteries. However, the policy met with resistance and was short-lived. Instead the government indicated that it would harness the doctrines of Buddhism in its efforts to reconstruct the war-damaged county. Today Buddhism is unofficially sanctioned by the government and is firmly established as an integral part of the country's cultural and religious heritage. It has become *"virtually the state religion in all but name"* (Evans, 2004, p. 14).

1.1.2 Origins of the state[10]

The history of Laos can be traced back to the Lao kingdom of Lane Xang, literally the Land of a Million Elephants, when, in the mid-14th century, King Fa Ngum unified much of what is today Thailand and Laos. Over the next several hundred years the kingdom held together through to the 17th century when as a result of struggles and disputes and shifting borders it lost much of its former wealth and power. Early in the 18th century, three separate principalities were established – Luang Prabang in the north, Vientiane in the centre and

8 Categories in the 2005 Census (GoL, 2005) include "rural with road" (51.5%) and "rural without a road" (21.3%).

9 The people of Laos have been grouped into four ethno-linguistic families: the Lao-Tai (67% of the population), the Mon-Khmer (21%), Hmong-Lu Mien (8%), and Chine-Tibetan (3%). These categories cover the 49 officially recognised ethnicities made up of around 200 ethnic subgroups (World Bank, 2006, p. xi). See GoL (2005) for 2005 census figures.

10 This overview of Lao history and governance draws on Savada (1994); Stuart-Fox (1997; 2008); and, Evans (2002; 2004).

Champasak in the south. However, from the late 18th century Laos entered a period marked by internal division and invasions from neighbouring countries to the extent that Thailand seized control of most of what is present-day Laos.

By the end of the 19th century France had annexed the Lao principalities and integrated them into its French Indochina territories along with Vietnam and Cambodia. In 1907, a Franco-Siamese treaty was signed which established the current border between Laos and Thailand. Colonization brought the three Lao principalities together although in slightly different relationships with France – Luang Prabang held the status of a French protectorate, while Vientiane and Champasak were both administered as French colonies, arrangements which lasted until the French were displaced by the invading Japanese during World War II. The colonization of Laos ended after the War when the country declared its independence from France.[11] However, after independence, Laos continued to be mired in a complex geopolitical struggle as the war[12] between the United States and Vietnam escalated. After years of internecine struggle between royalists, neutralists and leftists, the Royal Lao Government collapsed, the king abdicated, and on the 2nd December 1975 the communist *Pathet Lao* proclaimed the formation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR).

1.1.3 Governance and administration

Since the 1975 Lao Revolution the country has been governed by the Lao Peoples' Revolutionary Party (LPRP), an orthodox communist party modeled on the political ideology and structures of the former Soviet Union (Stuart-Fox, 2008) but owing allegiance to the Vietnamese (Brown & Zasloff, 1994). The Party is headed by a President and an eleven-member Politburo drawn from the fifty-five members of the party's Central Committee. Members of the Central Committee and the Politburo are elected at the Party Congress which is held every five years. The LPRP maintains a membership of 191,700 members[13] and branches of the Party are organized in a hierarchical fashion starting from the villages, rising up through the districts and the provinces, and culminating at the uppermost central level.

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[11] A number of dates are associated with Lao independence. Children in Laos are taught that independence came on 8th April 1945, although Stuart-Fox (1997) notes that this proclamation was made under pressure from the Japanese. In late 1945 French troops re-entered Laos and on 11th May 1946 Laos was declared a constitutional monarchy within the French Union. However, the signing in 1949 of a General Convention between France and Laos, signaled the beginning of the end of French colonization. After four years of negotiations, Laos and France signed the Franco-Lao Treaty of Friendship and Association on the 22nd October 1953. It is this date, which is recognized by historians such as Stuart-Fox (1997) and Evans (2002) as the date when Laos finally acquired independence from France.

[12] Various names have been used for the period of war from 1954-1975 including: The Second Indochina War, The American-Vietnamese War and the Vietnam War. With respect to Laos, it has also been referred to as the Lao Civil War, the Secret War, and commonly referred to in Laos as the "American War" (Stuart-Fox, 1997).

[13] See Lao National Assembly (GoL, 2012).

The legislature consists of a unicameral 132-member National Assembly which meets bi-annually and is elected for a period of five years. However, in practice it is the LPRP that controls the executive and legislative functions of government. While the 1991 Lao Constitution[14] established the LPRP as the sole legitimate political party, and Article 3 describes it as the "*leading nucleus*" of the political system (Evans, 2004, p. 7), independent candidates can stand for election to the National Assembly if approved by the Party. Four such independent members were elected in 2011. The National Assembly elects the Head of State – the President of Lao PDR - who in turn is responsible for appointing members to the Executive - the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. The President is also in charge of enacting the constitution and laws of the country.

Administratively Laos is comprised of 16 provinces and the municipality of Vientiane (see Map 1). Under Article 75 of the Constitution, each province and the municipality has the same three-tiered level of organisation – the provincial, the district and the village. Consequently even the city of Vientiane is organised into districts and villages. Currently there are 142 districts and 8,704 villages.[15] At the provincial and municipal levels, a governor is appointed to head up the administration and to chair the Provincial LPRP Committee, while district governors and village heads are responsible for administering their areas and chairing district and village LPRP committees.

1.1.4 Development and international aid

When the government came to power in 1975 it faced two major challenges - first, the reconstruction of a country that had been ravaged by war;[16] and second, coping with an exodus of people fleeing into exile. Stuart-Fox (2002) argues that this *"hemorrhage of the population"* (p. 233) was one of the most important influences on government policy over the first ten years of the LPDR.[17] Initially assistance for reconstruction was provided by the Soviet Union[18] including financial assistance, support from eastern-bloc advisors based in Laos, and educational scholarships for study in the Soviet Union. Vietnam also contributed significant economic aid ($US13 million dollars per annum) and educational scholarships

[14] The Constitution of the Lao PDR was promulgated on the 14 August 1991 and amended in 2003.
[15] Lao National Statistics Centre (GoL, 2009). See also Section 5.2.1 and Chapter 5,Footnote 151.
[16] During the period between 1964-1973 it is estimated that over 2 million tons of ordnance was dropped on Laos affecting around 25% of the country's villages. Laos is ranked one of the countries most heavily affected by unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the world (Sutton *et al.,* 2011).
[17] After the 1975 Revolution there was a period of political repression. Many members of the educated middle class as well as others who had worked alongside the American forces fled into exile - perhaps 10% of the population - while of the order of 10,000 to 15,000 others endured lengthy periods of up to 15 years in re-education camps (Evans, 2004).
[18] It is estimated that in the decade from 1975-1985, the amount of assistance received from the Soviet Union was US$40-50 million dollars annually with an additional US$100 million dollars of military assistance (Stuart-Fox, 2002).

(Stuart-Fox, 2002). In the first few years of the Lao PDR, reforms which centralized all planning and collectivized agricultural production were met by two years of drought, and this resulted not only in falls in production but also in increasing levels of dissatisfaction among farmers. By the middle of 1979, the campaign urging the creation of cooperatives ceased (Evans, 1990) and after a decade of austere soviet-style 'reforms' the *"collapse of the socialist economic project"* could no longer be denied (Evans, 2004, p. 8). An extensive review of policy at the Fourth Party Congress in 1986 resulted in the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) which included returning land to farmers, transforming the family economy, encouraging foreign capital and development assistance from western and other Asian countries, and generally, over the next 10 years, a liberalisation and opening up of the country.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and the subsequent loss of its aid program, Laos turned increasingly to international agencies such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations agencies, and to donor countries such as Sweden, Japan, Germany and Australia for assistance to build infrastructure and to promote social programs to reduce poverty. Although there has been significant economic and social progress in the last decade, Laos remains one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2011 Laos was ranked 138th out of 187 countries on the Global Human Development Index with 34% of the population living on less than $1.25 a day.[19] With limited budget resources the Lao Government remains highly dependent on 'official development assistance' (ODA).

In the last decade the Government has also emphasized the importance of working with international development partners in an effort to reduce poverty and to develop the country's human resource potential[20]. In 2006, with the signing of the *"Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness"*[21], it was recognised that the implementation of policies and plans requires the joint effort of both government and international partners. In terms of its overall development policy, the Government has adopted the Party's political directive to *"quit, once and for all, the rank of the least developed countries by 2020 by means of sustainable and equitably-distributed growth".*[22]

19 See UNDP (2011c).
20 See Part IV, Chapter 2 of the *National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy* (NGPES) (GoL, 2004).
21 The *Vientiane Declaration* was signed by the Lao Government and 25 development partners. See GoL (2006c).
22 Directive given at the Sixth Party Congress, 1996.

1.1.5 The Lao education system[23]

The education system in Laos is established under the Lao PDR Education Law[24] and administered by the MoE[25] under regulations and decrees issued by the Minister. Long-term goals and direction for the sector are given through the National Socio-Economic Development Plans drawn up by government every five years[26] along with other interlocking planning documents such as the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy[27] and the National Plan of Action for Education for All.[28] International aid agencies such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and donor countries such as Australia also exert considerable influence on the educational agenda[29] through large-scale projects and funding allocations.

The MoE is structured into twenty-one divisions[30] which extend the bureaucracy through the provinces and districts down to the schools. Supervisory and inspectorial responsibilities are carried out in each of the 16 provinces and in the Vientiane municipality through 17 Provincial Education Services (PES), and at the district level by 142 District Education Bureaus (DEB). Each PES prepares budgets, manages funding, appoints staff and distributes resources for the schools in its province and oversights the working of each of its DEBs. At the district level the DEB is responsible for ensuring that schools are open and operating to a standard timetable, that textbooks are distributed, and that school statistics are recorded and collated. The DEB is also responsible for providing teaching support to schools through Pedagogical Advisors (PAs); however, while the official duties of the PAs[31] include an advisory role, in practice their work tends towards inspectorial visits.

At the school level, responsibility for general operations and monthly reporting to the DEB lies with the principal. Since a Prime Ministerial decree was issued in 2008,[32] all

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23 The Lao education system is discussed further in Appendix 2, and for the sake of completeness, reproduces in part this section of the thesis.

24 See GoL (2007) for the Education Law. An analysis of the Education Law can be found in Hayden and Martin (2007).

25 After Laos hosted the 2008 South East Asian Games, the Government expanded the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to include sport and in September 2011 renamed the Ministry, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES). However, the fieldwork for this study was undertaken in 2009-2010; the description of the education system given in Section 1.1.5 and in Appendix 2 reflects the situation at that time when the schools were answerable to the MoE. In general terms, at the time of writing in 2012, the structures described above are still applicable.

26 See GoL (2006a) and GoL (2011) for the 6th and the 7th National Social and Economic Development Plan.

27 See GoL (2004).

28 See MoE (2005b).

29 For example through projects such as the Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP II) jointly financed by the Government of Lao (GoL) ($US8.0 million in kind), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) ($US20 million), and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) ($US9.6 million).

30 Details of the internal structure of the MoE are available on the Government of Lao website <http://www.laopdr.gov.la>

31 Ministerial Decree No 146/MOE.DGE/2007. (MoE, 2007b).

32 Prime Ministerial Decree No 13/PM (9 June 2008) (MoE, 2008c).

villages are required to establish a Village Education Development Committee[33] (VEDC) to work with local principals to oversee the running of the school, to ensure that buildings are safe and to see that 'volunteer' teachers awaiting permanency are supported by the village.

As shown in Table 1.1 below, the Lao education system operates at five levels:

Table 1.1: Levels within the Lao education system

Level	Description
Early Childhood Education	Nursery care (3 months to 3 years of age) Pre-Primary Education (3 to 5 years of age)
General Education	Twelve years of schooling (5 + 4 + 3) • 5 years Primary (compulsory) • 4 years Lower Secondary • 3 years Upper Secondary
Technical and Vocational Education	Courses up to 4 years duration, for example nursing, finance.
Higher Education	Degree courses offered at universities of 3 to 5 years duration. Higher Education includes training of upper secondary school teachers at university and training at Teacher Education Institutions (TEI) for pre-school, primary and lower secondary school teachers. This level also includes numerous private colleges.
Non-Formal Education	Focus is on improving literacy and numeracy skills at the village level of young people who have dropped out of school and adults who have never attended or not completed primary school.

Although all these levels operate to some degree throughout the country, it should be noted that even for basic primary education, Laos still has some way to go to achieve universal access and participation.[34]

For the purpose of this study this discussion is focused on teacher education. In Laos, primary and lower secondary teachers are trained through one of the eight regional Teacher Education Institutions (TEI)[35] (see Map 1) while training for upper secondary teachers is provided through the Faculty of Education at the National University of Laos (NUOL)[36] in

[33] See Section 5.2.2 for a discussion of the role of the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC).

[34] The aim of the Government is to meet Millennium Development Goal 2, that by 2015 *"children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education".*

[35] Up until 2010 there were three Teacher Training Schools (TTS) and five Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) in Laos. The TTSs were authorised to train pre-school and primary teachers and the TTCs to train pre-school, primary and also lower secondary teachers. In 2010 distinctions between TTCs and TTSs were progressively removed, a common nomenclature of Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) introduced, and course offerings expanded. While all the TEIs became authorised to train teachers through to the lower secondary level, the larger TEIs also began to offer degree level courses.

[36] Since 2008 the Tertiary Education sector in Laos has been undergoing rapid change. New public universities have been established in, or are being planned for, Champasak, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Xiengkhuang, while a number of private universities have also been mooted. The ability of the country to adequately staff and provide an approriate level of resources to these institutions and so provide a 'quality' education is an open question. See Chapman (2002) for an analysis of the factors driving Higher Education in Laos.

Vientiane. Prior to 2010 the training colleges/schools (now renamed Teacher Education Institutions) offered a range of courses for primary school teaching depending on the trainee-teacher's prior level of academic achievement at school. For example, the training colleges/schools offered a three-year certificate for students who had graduated from 8 years of formal schooling (the 8+3 program) and later, when 11 years of primary and high school education became the norm, the 8+3 program was phased out in most areas and a 1-year diploma, the 11+1 program, was introduced. This 11+1 program through which the beginning teachers who are the focus of this study graduated, was offered for the last time in the 2008-2009 academic year. In 2010 when lower secondary was extended from 3 years to 4 years of schooling, the 11+1 program was upgraded and a two-year diploma, the 12+2 program, is now offered in its place.

1.2 Focus of the Research

Many studies have been conducted in developed countries which have sought to understand the classroom realities which confront teachers. Some of these studies are specialised and focus on the 'beginning teacher'. However, in Laos only a handful of studies have been set within primary classrooms and none have used an ethnographic case study approach or been concerned with the beginning teacher. This study redresses the situation.

1.2.1 Four research questions

As background reading was undertaken and as the research study began to take shape, the aims of the research, initially quite amorphous, gradually crystallised. Four research questions were framed which encapsulate the study, while the answers to the questions constitute the substantive findings of the research. The four questions are:

1. *What expectations do trainee-teachers have about the roles they will perform and the responsibilities they will have as beginning teachers?*
2. *What is the nature of the professional experiences beginning teachers have during their first year of teaching?*
3. *In what ways and to what extent do beginning teachers develop their teaching practices during their first year of teaching?*
4. *What are the professional development needs of beginning teachers?*

Question 1 on expectations is discussed in Chapter 4; Questions 2 and 3 regarding the development of teaching practices are addressed in Chapters 5 and 6; and Question 4, on professional development needs, is answered at the end of Chapter 6. The findings presented in this way are then examined in the final two chapters of the study.

1.2.2 Location of the research

In deciding where to undertake the research it seemed logical to return to Champasak province where I had previously spent three years and where I knew many people. After receiving permission from the Vice-Minister to undertake the research, over the next six months I sought and obtained a number of other local approvals including authorisation from the Director of the Pakse TTC to undertake Stage 1 of the research at the College; from the Champasak PES authorisation to visit the DEB in Paksong, Bachiang, Sukuma and Champasak districts (see Map 2); from the DEBs authorisation to visit the four chosen villages, and finally, from the village heads and school principals, authorisation to visit their schools on a regular basis and stay in or near their villages. The negotiation of an open and transparent visiting schedule allowed the beginning teachers and the schools to know when I was coming and also helped to allay fears that I was carrying out a process of 'inspection'.

1.2.3 The research approach

Too often the voices of those for whom a reform is designed are not heard. This study addresses that issue by presenting the views of beginning teachers in context. It is the first study undertaken in Laos to focus solely on beginning teachers and the first to employ an ethnographic case study approach to an examination of rural primary schools. Here the intention is to examine 'up-close' how beginning teachers go about their everyday work of teaching and learning to teach in village schools.

By restricting myself to following four beginning teachers I was able to spend enough time to develop a professional working relationship with each person as well as with some of their colleagues. And by spending an extended period of time in each location, I was better able to discover what it meant to teach in a rural school. For six years prior to the research I had regularly visited such schools and saw stilted, rehearsed lessons. After a polite conversation I would depart having learnt nothing new. This research was designed to avoid artificial situations and to allow observations of teachers going about their ordinary work.

In seeking to understand the process of how beginning teachers' attitudes and practices changed during their first year of teaching, I first spent six months in the Pakse TTC following the progress of a cohort of twenty trainee-teachers during the last semester of their one-year pre-service course. In order to get to know them as individuals, I interviewed each of them three times and observed and videoed each of them during their six-week practicum. After the completion of the training course, and with their agreement to become participants in the study, I followed four of these graduates back to their assigned village schools. Now, as beginning teachers, they welcomed me and I was able to stay with each of them over four evenly spaced one-week long visits across the thirty-six week academic year. Over a total of eighteen weeks, I observed them teaching, talked to them and their colleagues about their work, and generally participated in their daily lives. The data collection tools I used included field notes, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, the journals they kept and the photographs they took. After each visit data were coded and analysed before the next visit so that knowledge developed cumulatively and each visit served to inform the next.

While themes were identified in the data, the literature on *"situated learning", "community of practice", "participatory appropriation"* and *"guided participation"* was drawn upon to discuss the ways teachers learn in the workplace and engage with their colleagues. Other literature reviewed in Chapter 3 is used to discuss the research findings as well as to make recommendations for improving the pre-service program and designing a beginning teacher support program appropriate to the social, cultural and political conditions.

1.2.4 Applicability of the study

An ethnographic case study, by its nature, does not aim for generalisability across wider populations. However, that does not mean that a degree of generalisation cannot be attained. The question to be answered is: 'To what extent can we take these case studies to be representative of the experiences of other beginning teachers in Laos?' From my experience of working in the teacher training colleges in Laos and visiting many rural primary schools, I contend that the homogeneity of the experiences and responses of the beginning teachers that were observed in the study, would extend to many similar situations. Such situations exist in ethnic Lao villages where beginning teachers have studied through similar courses using similar methods and where they are teaching in 'complete' schools, that is schools which offer the full five grades of primary education. These situations describe the circumstances of hundreds of beginning teachers across Laos every year.

What is not claimed is that the findings are applicable in urban settings. Nor is it claimed that the findings are directly applicable in non-Lao villages that are culturally and linguistically different, nor in small remote 'incomplete' schools[37] that have only one or two teachers and which run multi-grade programs. However, what is likely is that in these latter situations the conditions faced by beginning teachers may be even more extreme and their need for support even greater.

1.3 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Each chapter commences with an introduction outlining its purpose and content before the substantive material is presented and then ends with a summary conclusion.

Chapter 1 commences with a preamble providing background on the origins of the study. An overview of Laos follows including comment on ethnicity, religion, history, governance and education. The next section describes, the focus of the research, the four research questions, the location of the research, the research approach, and the limitations and applicability of the study. The organisation of the thesis is described in this final section.

Chapter 2 provides a three-part review of relevant literature: (i) the international aid debate on the provision of quality education; (ii) implementing school reform; and, (iii) teacher education. Special attention is paid in the third section to studies on the work experiences of beginning teachers, on effective pre-service programs and on work-place support programs including mentoring and induction.

Chapter 3 outlines the interpretative paradigm in which the research is set and describes the use of an ethnographic case study methodology to examine the professional lives of beginning teachers. The four-stage research design and the data collection tools of classroom observation, interviews, and teachers' journals are described and justified, and the data coding and analysis systems explained. Issues associated with research 'trustworthiness' particularly those relevant to cross-cultural research, are also examined.

[37] 'Incomplete' schools are those that offer less than the full five primary grades. Typically they are in remote areas, are of one or two classrooms, deliver a multi-grade program, and are administratively attached as 'satellites' to a complete school which offers the full five grades. The complete school and any attached satellite schools comprise a school 'cluster'. See TEADC (2004b) for details about the operations of such schools.

Chapter 4 describes the first stage of the research. It examines the professional experiences of trainee-teachers enrolled in a one-year primary teaching diploma program at the Pakse TTC. The chapter provides profiles of trainee-teachers, an analysis of the teacher education program, an account of the professional experiences of trainee-teachers during their course and an examination of the expectations they held towards teaching.

Chapter 5 examines the contextual pressures on the teachers stemming from events and activities in the village, from the District Education Bureau (DEB), from the school principal and from other teachers. The extent to which these pressures shaped the teaching practices adopted by the beginning teachers is explored.

Chapter 6 moves the study into the classroom. The experience of teaching, as reported by the beginning teachers and as observed by the researcher, becomes the focus. Five themes structure the chapter: the administrative requirements on beginning teachers; their dominant classroom practices; their attempts to use learner-centred methods; the efforts they made to devise strategies to help students learn; and, their professional needs as teachers.

Chapter 7 constitutes a discussion of the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Several constructs are used to examine the interactions of the beginning teachers with their colleagues. The chapter identifies the dilemmas which the beginning teachers encountered in the schools and the social strategies they adopted to 'survive' their first year.

Chapter 8 presents a set of recommendations for improving the quality of teacher education. These are aimed at improving the pre-service program and establishing a professional development program in the workplace. The chapter suggests some areas for further research and concludes with a summary of the thesis.

In addition to the eight chapters, four case records are provided in Appendix 1. They describe the villages and schools where the beginning teachers worked, and give portrayals of their families, their colleagues and the students they taught. They provide greater detail than would be possible were they included in the body of this thesis and complement descriptions of village life provided in Chapters 5 and 6. Appendix 2 provides additional background on the Lao education system.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: WHAT IS KNOWN

> *Entry into the profession is sudden: From one day to the next the beginning teacher has the same responsibility as a teacher with 40 years of service*.
>
> Veenman, 1984, p. 26

2.0 Introduction

The quotation above signals the immense challenges which beginning teachers face when they start teaching for the first time. This message, from a review of studies conducted in developed countries, is equally applicable within developing country[38] contexts where human and physical resources are always limited, often severely limited. The focus of this study is on the professional practices and experiences of beginning teachers in Lao PDR, consequently particular interest lies in understanding how beginning teachers in general cope with the complexities of teaching, but especially of those with only basic training and who work in resource-poor environments. In order to establish a context for the study, this chapter provides a critical review of the literature within three areas: the notion of 'quality' education in developing contexts (2.1); the implementation of educational reform (2.2); and, the education and experiences of beginning teachers (2.3).

Because the Lao PDR is a country that is highly dependent on international aid,[39] the first section of the review (2.1) deals with the agenda of the international development aid agencies. From an initial focus on 'access', the agenda shifted to the elusive notion of 'quality'. As a

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[38] The term 'developing country' is in common use in the international aid literature and is used here rather than the more specific 'low-income country'*; h*owever, the value-laden aspect of the word 'developing' is acknowledged. Easterley (2010, p. 9) comments *"The concept of development helps rationalize the position of autocrats by postulating an unstoppable transition toward a bright future. This is why donors call all poor countries 'developing'."* However, the perspective of FAO/UNESCO is that *"The designations 'developed' and 'developing' economies are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country, territory or area in the development process."* (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003, p. 2).

[39] The dependence of the Government of Lao (GoL) on foreign donors for educational expenditure is borne out by Bouapao, Sengchandavong and Sihavong (2000) who point to: "*The lack of own funding and overwhelming dependency on foreign donors for capital and development expenditure (school construction, textbooks, teacher training etc). The related donor conditionality 'ties' the receipt of donor support to application of unpopular and counterproductive measures"* (p. 9) and by the World Bank *et al.,* (2007a) who report: "*Throughout the last 10 years, investment spending has been approximately 50 percent of total public expenditure. By 2004–05, foreign funds accounted for over 90 percent of educational investment ... If recurrent spending is too low relative to investment, schools will be built in which successful teaching cannot take place due to the lack of operating funds to pay teachers, buy textbooks, or carry out essential maintenance. Today in Lao PDR, less than 20 percent of ODA consists of 'classic' infrastructure activity. Most ODA in education is capacity building or training of one sort or another. This is still measured (correctly) as investment in conceptual terms, but de facto the funds are administered and spent as though for recurrent items*" (pp. 87-88).

consequence of its dependency, the Lao education system finds itself subject to pressures emanating from external donors about what constitutes 'quality'. Consequently, in this review, the literature on 'quality schools' and 'quality teaching' is examined, followed by 'learner-centred' approaches to teaching. Consideration is also given to literature that suggests that there are alternative approaches to providing 'quality teaching' and to assessing 'quality'.

The focus of the second (2.2) is on the implementation of educational change. This is a pertinent area because the Government of Lao is currently attempting to introduce a variety of educational reforms which require teachers at all levels of the system to grapple with mandated changes to the curriculum and to pedagogy. Within this reform process it is the teachers who are considered to be the 'implementers' responsible for translating the policy of reform into everyday practice. Because of the potential impact of these reforms on beginning teachers, the literature on educational reform within western contexts is examined, followed by a review of studies focused on implementing educational reform in aid-dependent contexts.

In the final and most substantial section of the chapter (2.3), the literature on 'beginning teachers' is reviewed. While this is a broad area, it has been narrowed down to an examination of six specific topics: beginning teachers' practices; the influence of biography, pre-service training and contextual workplace influences on practice; learning in the workplace; induction programs; and, mentoring programs. Sociocultural theory in relationship to the influence of context on beginning teachers' learning, is also examined. Although most of the literature describes studies conducted in developed contexts, increasingly studies are being conducted in developing countries, and where relevant, these are included in the review. The section concludes with an examination of several educational research studies conducted in the Lao PDR.

2.1 'Quality' Education In Developing Contexts

The first part of this section (2.1.1) provides an historical overview of the international aid agenda. Then, after the research surrounding effective schools and effective teaching is examined, one of the central issues found in the literature - the difficulty of achieving 'quality' in teaching - is explored. Central to this issue is the adoption of a prescribed pedagogical method of teaching - the learner-centred approach and literature that deals with the challenges of its adoption is considered. The section concludes with an examination of the ways that have been put forward to assess and evaluate 'quality'.

2.1.1 A chronological overview of the provision of educational aid

The provision by international donors[40] of financial aid to developing countries in support of the reform of education, was initially accompanied by a discourse of 'improving access', but over the last twenty years the focus has shifted and the emphasis is now on the notion of 'improving quality' (Harvey & Green, 1993; Adams, 1993; Alexander, 2008). Since the 1948 proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), there has been a global drive by international agencies[41] to encourage and support developing countries to provide basic education for their citizens. The directions for education, including the shift of emphasis from 'access' to 'quality', has been guided by research that demonstrates the vital role education plays in furthering economic development, reducing poverty and improving living conditions (Beeby, 1966; Fuller, 1987; World Bank, 1995; Inter-Agency Commission WCEFA, 1990; UNESCO, 2004; UN, 2010). In 2003 the World Bank's commitment to education was summarised in the following terms: *"Education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth, sound governance and effective institutions."* (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotomalala, 2003, p. 1). The evidence that education improves living standards and alleviates poverty has, more recently, been supplemented by the belief that improved educational opportunity contributes to the promotion of human rights, democracy, and world peace (Verspoor, 2004; Jones, 2007a).

Over the three decades following the proclamation of the UDHR, there were significant educational advances in many developing countries with increased quantitative provision, particularly by building schools, training teachers, and providing textbooks. However, in the 1980s, decreasing enrolments, high attrition rates and low academic achievement became significantly more apparent (Verspoor & Leno, 1986; Verspoor, 1989). In response UN agencies[42] convened the World Conference on Education For All (WCEFA) in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, which adopted goals calling for a *"decade of initiatives"* to assist developing countries to pursue universal primary education. 1990 also saw the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) which signalled the importance of 'child-

[40] For example, the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the UK Department for International Development (DfID), the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNESCO and UNICEF.

[41] UNESCO and UNICEF, and the World Bank, have been foremost amongst these international organisations.

[42] UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank were the convenors of both the 1990 World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien, Thailand and the 2000 Education For All Conference in Dakar, Senegal.

centred education'. A decade after the Jomtien Conference, when the time-bound targets in areas such as enrolment, completion and achievement had not been met, a second Education For All Conference was held in Dakar, Senegal. The Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000) that resulted from the Conference was produced in response to the increasing evidence that 'quality' needed to be further addressed. At Dakar six Education For All Goals[43] were announced, and while their aims still featured increasing 'access to primary education' (Goal 2), they also highlighted the need for addressing issues of 'quality' (Goal 2 and Goal 6) (UNESCO, 2004). Increased enrolments and completion of primary schooling were no longer regarded as sufficient in themselves, rather there was agreement on the need for a renewed focus on learning outcomes. This message was repeated by the World Bank's Evaluation Working Group which, after examining more than 50 primary education projects in developing countries, concluded that the majority were still assessing the effectiveness of their projects primarily on the basis of repetition and completion rates rather than on any assessment of learning outcomes (World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, 2006).

A further international initiative occurred in 2000 when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration and its eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to *"provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme*

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43 The six Education For All (EFA) Goals declared at Dakar, Senegal in 2000 were:

Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

poverty in its many dimensions" (UNDP, 2011a).[44] With respect to education, the 189 signatories to the Declaration committed: *"To ensure that, by (2015), children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education"* (UNDP, 2011b).

The ongoing concern by donor agencies to extend access to basic education and improve 'quality', resulted in the 2002 establishment of the Education For All - Fast Track Initiative[45] (EFA-FTI) (World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, 2006) as a global partnership between donors and developing countries to help accelerate progress towards the MDG of universal primary education by 2015. While this initiative represents a concerted effort at coordination of effort by donor agencies, there are those who argue that the EFA-FTI fosters planned dependence, involving an increased reliance on technical assistance to fulfil the administrative requirements for receiving funds (Torres, 2003; Samoff, 2007; Hartwell, 2008). However, irrespective of such critiques, the World Bank and UN agencies anticipate that the EFA-FTI will provide resources that should enable developing countries to extend access, improve quality and implement reform plans.

2.1.2 Research studies on 'effective' schools

From the 1990s the focus on improving quality produced a collection of research studies, many commissioned by donor agencies. These studies sought to ascertain both the in-school and contextual factors which contributed to improving schooling outcomes in developing contexts. This 'effective schools literature' (Heneveld & Craig, 1996) included both empirical studies and

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44 The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declared at the United Nations in 2000 were:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

45 The Education For All - Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) through its Catalytic Fund is supported by United Nations agencies and the World Bank and is aimed at providing assistance to developing countries as they work towards meeting the EFA goals and educational Goal 2 of the MDG by 2015 (Bruns *et al*., 2003). In September 2011 the EFA-FTI changed its name to The Global Partnership for Education. (See <http://www.globalpartnership.org>).

reviews. Frequently cited work includes: Verspoor (1989)[46]; Lockheed and Verspoor (1991)[47]; Black, Govinda, Kiragu and Devine (1993)[48]; Dalin (1994)[49]; World Bank (1995)[50]; Heneveld and Craig (1996)[51]; Carron and Chau (1996)[52]; Scheerens (2000)[53]; Molteno, Ogadhoh, Cain and Crumpton (2000)[54]; Saunders, Riley, Craig, Poston and Flynn (2000)[55]; Chapman and Adams, (2002)[56]; and, Schubert and Prouty-Harris (2003)[57].

Studies commissioned by donor agencies initially focused on how 'quality' could result from the influence of discrete inputs to the education system. Jansen (1995) notes that measurements of school effectiveness were often undertaken through *"large-scale statistical methods ... to 'determine' the relative effects of different inputs on achievement"* (p. 194). Similarly Heneveld and Craig (1996) note the use of the economic *"production-function model"* (p. 9) which emphasises quantitative analytical techniques to determine how much of the student's academic achievement can be 'explained' by different inputs to the education system. For example, a World Bank (1995) study identified nine inputs as determinants of effective schools which could improve learning outcomes. In priority order these were libraries, instructional time, homework, textbooks, teachers' subject knowledge, teachers' experience, laboratories, teachers' salaries and class size. Torres (2003), however, argues that the identification of inputs was mostly based on economic judgements and assessed on the basis of two criteria - their cost, and then their influence on learning. The World Bank, she argues, when considering the support it was willing to provide, emphasised educational inputs on the basis of cost more than on the basis of pedagogical judgement – it is cheaper to increase the time for instruction than to reduce class sizes.

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46 An analysis of 296 education change projects funded by the World Bank between 1963 and 1984.
47 A review of World Bank funded research on effective schools from 1980 to 1991.
48 A research study across India, Pakistan, Kenya and Tanzania, funded by the Aga Khan Foundation, examining school reform.
49 Research in rural schools in Bangladesh, Colombia, and Ethiopia undertaken to identify factors that influence school effectiveness.
50 Synthesised findings on school effectiveness from World Bank sponsored research from 1980 to 1995.
51 A study of 26 World Bank primary education projects in Sub-Saharan Africa into school characteristics for effective education.
52 A comparative analysis into the functioning of 252 schools in China, India, Ghana and Mexico.
53 A review of UNESCO's literature aimed at providing a conceptual framework for effective schools.
54 Research on effective school characteristics of DfID sponsored Save the Children Fund (UK) programs in Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Peru, Mongolia, Mozambique and Pakistan.
55 A review for the World Bank on effective schooling in Africa.
56 A review of research on teaching and learning drawing on case studies in China, Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Vietnam, aimed at identifying educational reform issues and future needs.
57 A review of the Improving Quality Project commissioned by the African Development Education Agency (ADEA) in 17 African countries over the period 1991-2003.

Other major studies of school characteristics draw attention to internal factors within the school such as leadership, school 'climate', and teaching and learning approaches which can affect learning outcomes (Carron & Chau, 1996; Chapman & Adams, 2002; VSO, 2002; Schubert & Prouty-Harris, 2003). In a study of 26 World Bank primary education projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, Heneveld and Craig (1996) highlight this issue. They provide a conceptual framework of factors that they contend determine school effectiveness. Their study also draws attention to the responsive nature of these factors and the way they *"... interact with each other and are themselves influenced by the context surrounding the school. It is their interactions and the integrations amongst them in a school that determines a school's quality"* (*ibid*., p. 16). A similar conceptual framework for school effectiveness is given in Carron and Chau (1996) who present the *"teaching/learning process"* (p. 246) as a key element. Both studies are in broad agreement with the statement by Leu (2005) that *"... good teachers thrive only in positive and supportive environments"* (p. 23) while Verspoor (2004) in his work on teacher effectiveness in African contexts argues that: *"... for teachers to be truly effective they need the support of head teachers, the broader education systems and communities and parents"* (p. 6).

2.1.3 Research studies on 'effective' teaching

Within the 'effective schools' literature there is broad recognition that 'teaching practices' matter (Carron & Chau, 1996; Molteno *et al.,* 2000; VSO, 2002; Hattie, 2003). Surprisingly, however, this was not always the case. In developed countries, the work of Brophy and Good (1986) helped to shift attention from a purely 'inputs' perspective of teaching to the importance of teaching as 'process'. As they point out, "*What constitutes 'teacher effectiveness' is a matter of definition, and most definitions include success in socializing students and promoting their affective and personal development in addition to success in fostering their mastery of formal curricula*" (*ibid*., p. 328). One of the earliest studies in developing countries which highlighted that factors other than educational inputs need to be taken into account, was that by Verspoor (1989). He concluded that previous projects had failed to recognise the importance of classroom teaching (*ibid*., p. 19). Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) went on to identify the importance of 'process' and 'interaction' in the classroom. They concluded:

> *At present many of the teaching practices in developing countries are not conducive to student learning: (a) instruction for the whole class that emphasizes lectures by the teacher, has students copy from the blackboard, and offers them few opportunities to ask questions or participate in learning, (b) student memorization of texts with few opportunities to work actively with the material, and (c) little ongoing monitoring and assessment of student learning through homework, classroom quizzes, or tests.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 67)

In a comparative analysis of 252 schools in China, India, Ghana and Mexico, Carron and Chau (1996) also stress the importance of the teacher. Differences in student achievement were: *"more related to the quality of the teacher than to the availability of equipment"* (*ibid*., p. 263). Their research shows that teachers with low rates of absenteeism, who used work plans, prepared lessons, used an 'active' teaching style, gave regular homework and provided regular feedback to their students, tended to have better performing students. Heneveld and Craig (1996) report similar findings from Sub-Saharan Africa - teaching practices which enhance student learning are those that maximise learning time, use a variety of teaching strategies, set frequent homework and provide feedback to students. More recently, research undertaken by Molteno *et al.,* (2000) in nine developing countries, confirms that if poor teaching practices prevail, student achievement, even in schools with basic infrastructure and materials, will still be low. Today the message that 'teachers matter' is strongly promoted by the international agency, UNESCO:

> *What goes on in the classroom, and the impact of the teacher and teaching, has been identified in numerous studies as the crucial variable for improving learning outcomes. The way teachers teach is of critical concern in any reform designed to improve quality.*
>
> (UNESCO, 2004, p. 152)

A central issue that emerged from research on teaching in developing contexts, is the way which local contexts and culture influence the implementation of recommended pedagogical practices (Jansen, 1995). Fuller and Clarke (1994) argue that until the mid-1990s, much of the work to guide improvements had been directed by *"policy mechanics"* who believed that 'quality' could be achieved solely by the application of an appropriate mix of *"universal inputs"*. Fuller and Clarke assert that a closer examination of what happened inside schools and classrooms was needed in order to reveal how local culture alongside inputs can explain changes

in pedagogical practices. By 2000, the call was for: *"Reform initiatives, and research and development projects and their evaluations ... to take these very specific local and cultural factors into account"* (Saunders *et al.,* 2000, p. 17).

Much research on effective teaching in developing countries has focused on the conundrum of providing 'quality' education while working within major financial constraints. In developed countries, however, where resource levels are often vastly higher, research has tended to focus more on education as an agent of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and the structuring of an education that compensates for inequalities in achievement emanating from the unequal backgrounds of the students (Riddell, 1997). A common finding in the effective schools literature in developed countries, is that teachers are integral to helping students learn and to the 'value-added' nature of the learning. In other words, teachers who challenge students and stimulate thinking skills can help them achieve more than might be anticipated (Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore, 1995).

Research on teaching practices in developed countries identifies effective teachers as those who generate empathy and rapport with students, develop a supportive classroom climate, conduct teaching with clarity and purpose, hold high expectations of their students, maximise the time available for meaningful learning, provide well-structured lessons, draw on students' experiences, work to help students transit from the known to the unknown, use appropriate and varied questioning to develop reasoning and logic, set appropriate homework, use a diversity of teaching strategies, and who provide frequent feedback to their students (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Reynolds, 1992; Sammons *et al*., 1995; Brophy, 1999; OECD, 2005; Muijs & Reynolds, 2005).

These practices of effective teaching refer to the teacher's skills at engaging and interacting with students and are strongly influenced by the constructivist approach to education associated with Vygotsky (1978, 1986). Key elements are: connecting new ideas to prior knowledge; modelling behaviours and scaffolding; coaching and providing assistance to students; encouraging reflection and comparison; and, developing problem solving strategies. Compared to more traditional ways[58] of teaching where lessons are textbook-dependent, a constructivist approach tends to rely on activities and hands-on materials; knowledge is jointly constructed by teacher and student rather than presented by the teacher; teachers work from students' answers

[58] The term 'traditional' is synonymous with other descriptors such as 'didactic', 'formalistic', 'teacher-centered', 'expository' and 'instructional' (Guthrie, 2011).

rather than from a fixed curriculum of 'right' answers; and, assessment is based on portfolios and observational records rather than on testing (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005).

2.1.4 Towards learner-centred pedagogies in developing contexts[59]

For over twenty years, much of the literature from international agencies has been aimed at encouraging developing countries to shift away from the formalistic teaching styles which have prevailed, towards what they claim to be more effective methodologies such as 'active learning', 'participatory education' and 'learner-centred pedagogies' (Inter-Agency Commission WCEFA, 1990; UNICEF 2000; UNESCO, 2004). As referenced earlier, research into school and teacher effectiveness in both developed and developing contexts, has bolstered this message, evident during the Jomtien Education for All Conference in 1990 (Inter-Agency Commission WCEFA, 1990) and reiterated in 2000 at the Dakar Education for All Conference (UNESCO, 2000). For example the Dakar Framework for Action advocated for Sub-Saharan Africa *"a learning environment that is safe and intellectually stimulating, and a pedagogy based on a learner-centred approach and democratic values and practices in the teaching-learning interaction"* (*ibid*., p. 30). Similarly UNICEF (2000) claims that traditional ways of learning found in many developing country classrooms, such as rote memorisation, do not fit the needs of learners in a world where the knowledge base is rapidly expanding and social and economic changes are the norm. Their vision is of *"trained teachers [using] child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and [using] skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities"* (*ibid.*, p. 4). Dahlström (2007), writing about Laos, confirms that since international aid initiatives commenced in the mid-1990s student-centred teaching has been "*the central concept used in the reform discourse*" (p. 10).

However, running counter to the advocacy of international agencies are those who argue against an uncritical acceptance of learner-centred education in developing countries. For example Guthrie (1990) claims that in their drive to 'modernise' education, donor agencies have often underestimated the time, resources and training required for successful implementation of learner-centred methods. This position is supported by Schweisfurth (2011), who, in a wide-ranging review concludes: *"... the history of the implementation of LCE in different contexts is*

[59] 'Learner-centred', 'student-centred' and 'child-centred' teaching/learning/education/pedagogy, are approaches commonly advocated in the international aid literature, with terms often used synonymously, but rarely defined. 'Learner-centred' is usually put forward in opposition to 'teacher-centred' where the competing elements are those of student choice, student activity and teacher-student power relationships (Kolb,1984; Silcock & Brundrett, 2001).

riddled with stories of failures grand and small" (p. 425). And Tabulawa (2003), from an African perspective, provides an incisive critique of learner-centred pedagogy that calls into question not only the practical difficulties of its implementation in many developing contexts, and also what he sees are the imposition of its inherent social and political values, calling for donors to consider more *"culturally responsive pedagogies"* (*ibid*., p. 22).

Challenging the universal appropriateness of learner-centred pedagogy, O'Donoghue (1994) and Alexander (2000, 2008) see value in the retention of some types of 'formalistic approaches' to teaching in traditional, authoritarian or resource-limited contexts. In his earlier work, Alexander draws on Bruner's (1996) identification of ways in which children engage in learning, each with an associated style of teaching: through imitation; through didactic exposure; through discourse, collaboration and negotiation; and, through the management of their own 'objective' knowledge (*ibid.,* pp. 55-63). Recognising value in these approaches and their teaching methods, Alexander (2000) warns against consigning too much *"to the despised archive of 'traditional' methods"* (p. 527). He shows there are contexts in which 'demonised' traditional pedagogical practices and 'teacher talk'[60] may both be useful for imparting particular kinds of knowledge. He provides numerous examples to show that poor quality teaching can be found within each of the four different approaches, including learner-centred approaches, and not just the more traditional type, something too often ignored in the discourse intended to guide reform in developing countries.

Similarly Pratt (2002) advances the case that the five teaching approaches he identifies - transmission, developmental, apprenticeship, nurturing and social reform - allow for 'good quality' teaching to exist alongside 'poor' teaching practice. Research in the USA shows that a balance between approaches where the teacher retains full power and control over the students and more *laissez faire* student-centred approaches may, in some situations, be the most appropriate method for improving student outcomes (Wohlfarth, Sheras, Bennett, Simon, Pimentel & Gabel, 2008).

[60] Alexander (2000), in his study of primary pedagogy across England, France, India, Russia, and the United States describes five forms of classroom talk set along a continuum of teaching approaches from 'transmission' to 'discovery', namely 'rote', 'recitation', 'instructional/exposition', 'scaffolded dialogue' and 'discussion'.

Regardless of the approach adopted, it is argued that it is the interactions between teachers and students that should be central to the quality debate (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005). One of the few research studies conducted in Laos on classroom discourse (TEADC, 2004a), concluded that when classroom talk is dominated by teacher-led recitation it does little to help students gain understanding or develop language for anything other than reproductive purposes. The research on teacher-student interaction recognises the value of teacher and student talk in learning (Alexander, 2000; Mercer and Littleton, 2007). In particular, dialogic teaching and the use of teachers' questioning and feedback skills to develop higher-order thinking skills in students has become increasingly valued as a way to improve quality in the classroom (Baumfield & Mroz, 2004; Nassaji & Wells, 2000).

These challenges to an uncritical acceptance of learner-centred approaches as a panacea for educational ills in developing contexts, have not gone unheeded. After the effective schools research of the 1990s, UNESCO, in its EFA Global Monitoring Report (2004) signalled that: *"structured instruction may be the more pragmatic option for providing satisfactory quality in education ... in situations of severe resource constraints, high pupil/teacher ratios (which complicate classroom management and individual learning strategies) and underqualified or unmotivated teachers"* (p. 154). Here, in the spectrum between 'traditional' chalk-and-talk teaching and open-ended instruction, 'structured teaching' is taken to be *"a combination of direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning"* (*ibid*., p. 153). Increasingly there is recognition that to be able to effectively use learner-centred approaches, a number of factors have to be in place including adequate physical resources, well-motivated teachers, suitable assessment strategies, and training for both teachers and educational managers (UNESCO, 2004).

While there has been a shift in the aid discourse (UNESCO, 2004) that in some circumstances a combination of direct instruction and student-centred approaches may be appropriate, it is evident that there is still a lack of acknowledgement of many of the perspectives highlighted above. For example, in Laos, the *Education Quality Standards* document,[61] Indicator #14 states: "*Teachers (will) use student centered methods and teaching/learning materials, personalized to the individual needs and learning styles of their pupils*" (MoE, 2011c). This issue of the challenges faced by teachers in developing contexts who attempt to adopt a learner-centred approach to teaching is examined in the next section.

[61] Prior to 2011, these standards were referred to as 'Schools of Quality Standards', developed with assistance from UNICEF.

2.1.5 The challenges of implementing a learner-centred pedagogy

The review now considers some of the research regarding the challenges faced by teachers in developing countries who have attempted to improve 'quality' by adopting a learner-centred approach to teaching. These challenges, some touched on earlier, can be grouped as: (i) lack of time; (ii) lack of a clear understanding of what constitutes a learner-centred approach; (iii) lack of physical resources; and, (iv) a clash with values and culture.

Adopting a learner-centred approach to teaching requires substantially more time for both preparation and implementation than initially considered by those involved in educational planning (O'Donoghue, 1994; Guthrie, 1990). Teachers in developing countries, who are usually poorly paid, often rely on work outside school hours to survive, and are often able to devote only limited time to preparing lessons and resources. The problem of insufficient time is compounded if teachers are required to incorporate aspects of a learner-centred approach into a textbook-based curriculum. Studies have shown (Molteno *et al*., 2000) that it is difficult for teachers to integrate 'hands-on' and 'group activities' into textbook lessons and this creates additional pressure on teachers already working under tight timeframes to meet the basic requirement to 'get through the textbook'.

The knowledge and skill levels required to effectively implement learner-centred teaching is also often grossly underestimated. Studies in Namibia (O'Sullivan, 2004; 2006), Malawi (Mtika & Gates, 2010) and China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009) found that teachers had often received lectures about learner-centred teaching during pre-service or inservice training, but had rarely seen the approach in action or experienced what it involves. In many cases they had received only limited training in some of the strategies but had never had the opportunity to discuss learner-centred philosophies or practice with experienced teachers.

These conclusions support research in Laos (TEADC, 2004a) that found that the understanding by primary teachers in rural areas of the principles behind a learner-centred approach were *"superficial"* (p. 1). Similarly Dahlström (2007) writes that the policy of adopting a learner-centred approach has been reduced to the adoption of the Lao *"five-pointed star"* model, with each point referencing a different teaching strategy. The five teaching strategies are: (i) activities; (ii) group work; (iii) teaching aids; (iv) questioning; and, (v) relevance to daily life. He argues that the model is shallow and insufficient for providing the educational base teachers

need in order to appreciate the philosophy of a learner-centred approach. For many teachers the star itself, stripped of content and meaning, has become its own nonsensical method. Fuller and Clarke (1994) also show that even when teachers have access to sufficient inputs they may not utilise them to implement a learner-centred approach if they do not have a clear understanding of the underlying educational philosophy.

The third challenge teachers in developing contexts are likely to encounter in trying to implement a learner-centred approach is the need for resources. Schubert and Prouty-Harris (2003) argue that a learner-centred approach requires small classes, well-trained teachers and a good range of learning materials. In this regard Torres (2003) claims that the donor agencies, while advocating learner-centred education, have avoided the reality of the resource needs and the costs involved, particularly for smaller classes and quality pre-service programs. Being told to adopt a learner-centred approach is likely to stretch the capabilities of even highly experienced teachers when their reality is poor physical infrastructure, large classes and limited teaching resources (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991).

The fourth challenge relates to the potential clash between the values inherent in a 'traditional' school culture and the more radical values at the heart of a learner-centred philosophy of education. The challenge concerns not only how students might respond to their teachers but also how they may, albeit unconsciously, react to the norms within their broader social environment. A study by Arthur (1998) on the introduction of a learner-centred approach to primary classrooms in Botswana, reports on the negative reactions of parents who believed their children were becoming too outspoken. This illustrates that the values and behaviours encouraged in school may be unacceptable within the broader community. Similarly O'Sullivan (2004), undertaking research in Namibia, reports that the development of critical thinking in the classroom encouraged students to question adults, but this was seen as in *"direct contrast to the case study cultural context"* (*ibid.*, p. 596). It is not necessary to invoke images of the Taliban to find *"conservative resistance"* (Dello-Iacovo, 2009, p. 241) in cultures where the values of modern education are interpreted as inimical to the traditional values of the family and society.

The literature on learner-centred education reviewed above, serves as a reminder that there can be value in considering the merits of other approaches to teaching (Alexander, 2000; Bruner 1996); that the interactive nature of classroom talk can develop higher-order thinking skills (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005; Mercer & Littleton, 2007); that for learner-centred education to be

effective teachers need to develop 'deep understandings' of the method (O'Sullivan, 2004); that in many developing contexts limited physical resources may restrict appropriate implementation (Guthrie,1990); and that in some situations the broader cultural, social and political values may be opposed to the values inherent in a learner-centred approach (O'Sullivan, 2002; Tabulawa, 2003). While the studies cited above have focused on the implementation of a learner-centred pedagogy, the next section turns to studies of curriculum and the role it plays in facilitating or inhibiting particular pedagogical approaches.

2.1.6 The curriculum and learner-centred approaches

If teachers are to effectively address the issue of student learning, they not only need appropriate teaching strategies but also the support of a responsive and flexible curriculum. However, in many developing countries the words of Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) still resonate: *"textbooks are the major - if not the only - definition of the curriculum"* (*ibid.,* p. 46). Their review of a decade of World Bank funded research on effective schooling in developing contexts revealed that textbooks – the default curriculum - were more often than not poorly designed and their content: *"fails to reinforce the development of higher order thinking skills"* (*ibid*., p. 46).

Recent research has shown how education systems in many developing countries have rigorously adhered to a formalised 'collection' curriculum (Bernstein 1971) and how this affects the type of teaching approach utilised. While such a curriculum allows teachers with limited training to understand what content has to be taught and also fulfils an instructional role, it does little to assist teachers to genuinely respond to the learning needs of students. The inability of such a curriculum to support learner-centred approaches has been noted by Sriprakash (2010, 2011), who through her studies of primary schools in India, analysed child-centred education reforms. In so doing she turns attention to the relevance of much of Bernstein's work (1966, 1971, 2000) which shows how a 'collection' curriculum restricts not only the selection and sequence of knowledge but also the type of pedagogical practice which is possible. Cheewakaroon (2011), who has reached a similar conclusion, points to the discordance in Thailand between the learner-centred approaches advocated for its primary schools and the rigid curriculum that exists in the secondary schools.

Other studies set in developing countries, such as those by Barrett (2007) in Tanzania, Hoadley (2008) in South Africa, and Nyambe and Wilmot (2008) in Namibia have shown how the curriculum in those countries is 'strongly framed'. This framing increases the power of the teacher in the teacher-student relationship (Bernstein, 1971) and is at odds with more egalitarian student-teacher relationships found in the constructivist notion of a learner-centred pedagogy (Weimer, 2002). Teachers in such systems are required to follow national directives which set the timetable, the pace of lessons without regard to the students, and the content to be taught upon which students will be examined (Hartwell, 2008). This notion of a national curriculum that specifies the teaching of a fixed repertoire of knowledge and skills within a specific time frame, sits uneasily alongside what are often concurrent directives that teachers will adopt 'learner-centred approaches', focus on 'problem solving', and foster 'authentic learning' (Crossley, 1984). Similarly a study by Chounlamany and Kounphilaphanh (2011) conducted in Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) across Laos concluded that:

> *Teachers and students point to the structuring effects of the curriculum, the teacher guides, lesson plans and assessment models which make it difficult for teachers to modify the content in order to make it more student-centred. In the end, the student must pass the exams and these are structured according to textbook content.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 152)

One response to the problem of a disjunction between a rigid national curriculum and the rhetoric of transforming teaching through learner-centred pedagogical practices is for teachers and the local community to become involved in curriculum design. Atchoarena and Gasperini (2003), under commission to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and UNESCO, have put forward useful guidelines for rural schools in developing contexts for designing basic education curricula. They suggest that the curriculum: (i) reflect the local context, customs, livelihoods and rural development activities; (ii) take into account the level of training of the teachers; (iii) make use of locally available skills, knowledge and other resources; and, (iv) respond to the expressed wishes of the community, determined through consultation and negotiation. However, undertaking curriculum design is significantly more complex than simply rewriting textbooks. Torres (2003) explains that the process requires *"sustained information, participation, discussion and social elaboration"* (p. 313). However, she further contends that there is little evidence of donor support to assist developing countries to produce curricula that follow more than 'banking' or 'transmissive' models of education (*ibid.,* p. 307). The benefits in

developing contexts, of a curriculum based on a transformative model (Freire, 1972) are argued by both Avalos (1992) and Hartwell (2008). While transformative models appear well-suited to the learner-centred pedagogies advocated by donor agencies, enormous political will and sustained investment will be required if the current curriculum approaches are to change in any substantial way. In many developing countries the unenviable task of trying to manage the contradictions of a learner-centred pedagogy imposed alongside a strongly framed national curriculum, still sits squarely on the shoulders of the teachers.

As outlined above, the task of aligning curriculum with appropriate pedagogy so that it supports teachers and ultimately works to improve the learning outcomes of students, challenges both government and donor agencies. The following section now draws attention to the literature on defining quality and considers studies which have informed the debate about how quality can be assessed.

2.1.7 Dimensions of quality

While the notion of providing 'quality' is central to the aid discourse between donors and partner countries, agreement over what constitutes 'quality' in education is not so easy to reach (Motala, 2001). Adams (1993), for example, in a review of 'quality education', identified six commonly held positions: (i) quality as reputation (folklore, public opinion); (ii) quality as resources and inputs (textbooks, teacher qualifications, facilities); (iii) quality as outcomes (academic achievement, pass rates); (iv) quality as process (teacher-student interaction, levels of learner participation); (v) quality as content (teaching of literacy, numeracy, life skills, and other contemporary content); and, (vi) quality as value-added (overall development of students). These positions, sometimes referred to as *"dimensions of quality"*, are frequently cited in the literature on school effectiveness (Jansen, 1995; UNICEF, 2000; Ginsberg & Schubert, 2000; Schubert & Prouty-Harris, 2003; Leu, 2005; Leu & Price-Rom, 2006). In summarising his position Adams (1993) states that 'quality' is: *"multidimensional"*, *"dynamic"* and *"grounded in values, cultures and traditions specific to a given nation, province, community, school, parent or individual student"* (p. 14). These views are supported by Bergmann (1996) who also identifies quality as multidimensional and emphasises its dependence on the synergy between various input-process-outcome dimensions. Like Adams (1993), Heneveld and Craig (1996), Fuller and Clarke (1994) and Jansen (1995), point to the importance of context and culture in defining educational quality.

2.1.8 Assessing quality

As outlined earlier in the discussion of 'effective schools' and 'effective teaching' a number of dimensions of educational quality have been identified, each requiring an appropriate form of measurement. While inputs to the education system are generally assessed quantitatively, learning, as the ultimate output of the educational process, is somewhat more complex to evaluate. This section turns to the problematic area of assessing learning, as a proxy for quality education, through the traditional means of tests, and then briefly considers how an examination of the teaching process may provide insights into what is being learnt and how this is happening.

Much of the literature on effective schools in developing contexts (UNICEF 2000; UNESCO, 2004) shows how outcomes have been judged primarily on the basis of student achievements in literacy and numeracy, and more theoretically, on the extent to which students have concurrently acquired *"attitudes and essential life skills necessary for individuals to function effectively in their society"* (Inter-Agency Commission WCEFA, 1990, p. 46). However, as there is no simple measure of 'life skills', school assessment has focused on measuring cognitive skills, mainly using exams (Hartwell, 2008; Sifuna & Sawamura, 2011). There is, however, a debate over the appropriateness of using test results to assess learning. For example Torres (2003) claims that class tests in traditional education systems in developing countries typically measure only the transmittal of the content of the curriculum learnt mainly by the memorisation of facts and the recitation of set words and texts. Tests of comprehension, or the application of concepts in original contexts, are rarely, if ever, included. Under such a system, teaching quality is judged to be 'high' when students are able to accurately reproduce the content of the curriculum. Crossley (1984), in research on education in Papua New Guinea, and Kipnis (2011), working in primary schools in rural China, report similar findings. Other difficulties associated with using test results as a measure of quality have been identified by Carron and Chau (1996). In their study of both urban and rural schools in China, India, Ghana and Mexico, they show that low test scores reflected the fact that teachers either did not have time to cover the whole curriculum or undertook work too hastily because of many interruptions to school life. A summary of the positions advanced here is found in Fuller and Clarke (1994) who, drawing upon Rugh's (1992) ethnographic work in Pakistani primary schools show:

> *Teachers are rewarded for covering the curriculum "on time" and seeing that their pupils can provide the correct, memorized responses from their textbooks to questions posed by headmasters. The textbook is the key collection of facts around which proper socialization and "achievement" is defined. The surface-level transmission of knowledge occurs on top of a much deeper process of child socialization and normative ways of behaving in the school setting, with recall exercises indicating whether the student has been serious and hard working. The textbook becomes a central tool for reinforcing this sacred method of socialization.*
>
> Fuller and Clarke, 1994, p. 141

Such findings reveal the limitations of testing. They suggest that until curricula are altered and assessment methods modified, test results will continue to gauge primarily the student's memorisation skills. Furthermore, teachers will be less inclined to use teaching practices which require more than memorisation for fear that students will not pass the exams. Using limited test results to assess outcomes, and by inference teaching quality, says nothing about the kind of learning regarded as necessary to prosper in a rapidly changing world (Samoff, 2007; Kipnis, 2011). As McGinn and Schiefelbein (2010) argue, "*test scores measure only a sample of what is learnt in schools*" (p. 436). O'Sullivan (2006) further explains, while exam results can offer insights into the amount of learning taking place, they often provide little insight into the quality of either the teaching or the learning. Policy makers, she argues, need to move away from *"... a reliance on input and output conceptualisations of quality towards a commitment to a context-focused teaching and learning process perspective"* (p. 258).

In searching for a valid measure of 'quality' education, O'Sullivan (2006) suggests that lesson observations can provide valuable data on the teaching context and inputs available to the system and thus gauge what can be expected of students in terms of literacy, numeracy and life skills. Her suggestion is supported by calls from Jansen (1995) and Riddell (1997) for more ethnographic data to inform the quality debate. Riddell argues that case study research *"would inform central, regional or district policy makers about the effect of decisions made above the level of the school"* (*ibid.,* p. 190). Ultimately the 'quality' of an education system cannot be determined through the application of reductionist tests, even if well-constructed. The complexity of providing then evaluating 'quality' education in diverse settings in developing countries requires an evaluation process which provides guidance to teachers on how to improve their practice. Goe, Bell and Little (2008) in a study of approaches to evaluating teaching quality, argue for a multidimensional approach that includes classroom observations, evaluations by the

school principal, analysis of classroom artefacts, teacher portfolios, teacher self-reports, student ratings of teacher performance, and value-added models. These will incorporate pre-test and post-test student as a measure of how successful teachers have been at teaching their students, at least how to pass tests.

In recognition of the multidimensional nature of educational quality (inputs, processes, outputs, value-added nature), donor agencies have, over the last 10-15 years, devised quality indicators for the reform of education systems. For example UNICEF (2000), following earlier effective schools research, constructed a five dimensional framework for quality education: (i) quality learners; (ii) quality learning environments; (iii) quality content; (iv) quality processes; and, (v) quality outcomes. This work was extended in 2009 when UNICEF published their *Child Friendly Schools Manual* (UNICEF, 2009) including indicators for each of the five framework dimensions. Developing countries were encouraged to use the framework and supported to customise the indicators to fit their own contexts.[62]

According to Heneveld (1994) the value of such frameworks is that rather than looking solely at student achievement they highlight conditions which have been identified as conducive to learning. While there is considerable support for the use of frameworks to guide countries through a process of assessing quality, two noticeable criticisms stand out. The first, advanced by Motala (2001) on the basis of her South African research, argues for careful scrutiny of the choice of indicators as these will strongly influence what is counted and what is ignored in the final performance of learning and teaching. The second criticism arises from the writings of Adams (1993) and Heneveld and Craig (1996), who argue that there is a danger that frameworks and their associated indicators may be misappropriated and used as proxy checklists for inspection and evaluation. If this occurs, the valuable opportunity the frameworks present for creating a stimulus for dialogue as countries work towards improving educational quality, particularly at the school level, may be lost.

Within each of the dimensions of 'quality', teachers are the key to improving what happens between inputs and learners. Acknowledgement that a variety of teaching approaches are appropriate (UNESCO, 2004), that responsibility for aligning the curriculum to make it

[62] In 2008 the Lao Ministry of Education received support from UNICEF to develop a 'quality' framework and to produce a *Schools of Quality Implementation Guidelines for Primary Schools* document (MoE, 2010a).

interesting and relevant rests with the teacher (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003), and that the nature of the student-teacher interaction in the classroom matters (Alexander, 2000), are basic messages which teacher education programs need to address.

2.1.9 Summary

The literature reviewed in this section has identified the key shifts made by aid agencies regarding the education agenda. A major shift occurred in the 1980s when the focus on 'access' moved to 'quality'. This new emphasis was felt at the school level, where inputs considered vital to making schools 'effective' were supported by international aid agencies. Then in the mid-1990s the 'quality' focus moved towards teaching and learning. However, gauging the quality of teaching and learning was more complex than originally anticipated. Initially, the aid agency literature, equated 'quality' in teaching with the adoption of a learner-centred approach. However, later studies, many of them undertaken independently of the agencies, revealed that gauging quality was not easy. Many of these studies documented the challenges of low resources levels, of limited training opportunities, and of social, cultural and political contexts that mitigated against any easy adoption of a single approach. Other research suggested that different approaches each had a place in helping children learn and that it was important to move away from the oversimplification of a teacher-centred/learner-centred dichotomy, or as Barrett (2007) puts it, from a "*polarisation of pedagogy*" (p. 273).

Over the last decade a more pragmatic position towards 'quality' has entered the international aid literature (UNESCO 2004). However, the literature also reveals there is still a lingering predisposition towards equating a 'learner-centred' approach[63] with 'quality teaching'. This section of the chapter has also highlighted that alongside the debates on quality, there have been attempts to develop and promote 'checklists' of quality indicators. Although indicators of 'quality' can serve a purpose (Heneveld, 1994), it is the process of implementation that is crucial. As Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) noted: *"National decision makers can establish standards for curricular and examinations, official timetables, teacher certification criteria, and attendance and promotion policies, but they cannot control what happens in each school or classroom"* (p. 44). An examination of how change can be implemented becomes the focus of the second section of this review.

[63] In Laos the 2011 *Education Quality Standards* document includes the promotion of 'learner-centred' approaches (MoE, 2011c).

2.2 Educational Reform

In this section the literature on the implementation of educational reform is examined. An understanding of the change processes involved is central to this study as Lao PDR is currently engaged in a number of attempts to implement educational reforms.[64]

During the 1990s, when research on 'effective schools' began to merge with research on 'school improvement' a consensus developed that educational reform is a complex process which, for successful implementation, requires much more than a simple identification of indicators of effectiveness (Levin and Lockheed, 1993; Reynolds, Bollen, Creemers, Hopkins, Stoll & Lagerweij, 1996; Adams, Clayton, Rakotamanana & Wang, 1997; Harris, 2000). Fullan (1982; 2007), Stoll (1999) and Hopkins (2001) are among many who have undertaken research in developed countries into the nature of that process, while in developing contexts where there has been less work, Dalin's (1994) study,[65] *How Schools Improve,* has been highly influential and did much to de-bunk a number of 'obvious' truths about educational reform, that were previously widely held. Recent studies by Gottelmann-Duret (2000), Motala (2001) Schubert and Prouty-Harris (2003), Stephens (2007), Cummings (2008), Hartwell (2008), Mpokosa and Ndaruhutse (2008), and Schweisfurth (2011) also provide valuable messages for administrators and educators in developing countries involved in educational reform and school improvement. The studies listed above form the foundation for this second topic and show that when power and political structures are centralised, resources are in short supply, and 'school' may be only one of several jobs a teacher undertakes in order to survive, the task of bringing about positive change is particularly challenging.

Educational reform at the school and classroom levels has been analysed as occurring through three stages: 'adoption', when the need for reform is identified and planned; 'implementation', when the new ideas or structures are introduced; and 'institutionalisation', when the reforms are bedded down as normal practice (Fullan, 1982, 1992, 2007; Hargreaves, 1995; Adams *et al.,* 1997). Of particular interest to this study is the implementation phase,

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64 The reform initiatives in Laos have been promulgated through documents such as the *EFA National Plan of Action 2003-2015* (MoE, 2005b); the *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010)* (MoE, 2006a); the *Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan (2011-2015)* (MoES, 2011b); the *National Charter of Teacher Competencies* (MoE, 2007a); the *Schools of Quality Implementation Guidelines for Primary Schools* (MoE, 2010a); and, the *National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015* (MoE, 2006b).

65 Dalin's (1994) study was based on World Bank sponsored research in 31 primary schools in Colombia, Ethiopia and Bangladesh.

defined by Fullan (2007) as *"the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change"* (p. 84), and which is intricately linked to capacity building of both individuals and organizations. The literature related to the complexities of implementing educational reform, particularly at the school level, is discussed under eight headings derived from Adams *et al*., (1997) and Fullan (2007). They are: (2.2.1) approaches to educational reform; (2.2.2) aims of educational reform; (2.2.3) pre-conditions for educational reform; (2.2.4) 'local' factors affecting educational reform; (2.2.5) 'external' factors affecting educational reform; (2.2.6) 'intervening' factors affecting educational reform; (2.2.7) cultural considerations; and, (2.2.8) customising educational reform.

2.2.1 Approaches to educational reform

A number of approaches to reform have been identified. Harris (2000), for example, describes 'mechanistic' and 'organic' approaches that are very similar to Dahlström's (2008) 'directive' and 'participatory' approaches. The mechanistic/directive approach is primarily 'top down' with schools following, step-by-step, a set of standardised procedures determined by a 'higher authority'. The organic/participatory approach is less structured and focused more on broad principles with schools given greater freedoms to implement change directly. Depending on the strengths and weaknesses in the system, the 'organic/participatory' approach can be employed simultaneously at the levels of teacher, organisational unit, and school (Harris, 2000). It is a dynamic approach and typically incorporates support for the school to undergo change. Fullan (1992, 2007) and Hopkins (2001) have advocated similarly holistic approaches to building capacity and to the introduction of school reform through a 'participatory' approach.

2.2.2 Aims of educational reform

While the key reason for undertaking educational reform is to improve student achievement, there are often associated objectives that may need to be addressed first (Huberman, 1992). Change directed at improving student learning may involve eliminating ineffective and low quality teaching (Lopez-Segrera, 2010) or may involve the challenge of implementing a new curriculum or pedagogy (Dalin, 1994). Improving teacher motivation, performance, and learning (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Stoll, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001) or increasing institutional capacity (Hopkins, 2001; Fullan, 1992; 2007) are other objectives to be considered in the struggle to increase student achievement. However, distinctions between changes in student performance,

teacher performance, and school capacity are difficult to make. As Adams *et al.,* (1997, p. 7) note: *"School level outcomes are influenced by instructional and classroom practices and vice versa"*. In other words, the reform process is multifaceted and the levels of change interrelated, although as Huberman (*op. cit*.) comments, the degree of success of each of the associated tasks can ultimately be judged only in terms of the degree of impact on the students.

2.2.3 Preconditions for successful educational reform

Pre-conditions for successful educational reform identified in the literature are (i) the recognition that there is a need for reform; (ii) accepting that reform is nearly always complex; and, (iii) being aware that the intended reforms should be explained with clarity. Fullan (2007) notes that these pre-conditions are interactive and that each serves to support change.

(i) Recognition of the need for reform

Rosenholtz (1989), Adams *et al.,* (1997) and Fullan (2007) all assert that for the adoption of educational reforms such as to increase completion rates, improve learning outcomes, or alter teaching practices, the staff within the education system who are the target of change, need first to recognise and accept that reforms are necessary. Sarason (1982), for example, describes a number of school reform programs and shows that the lack of involvement on the part of teachers in the planning of the reform process and a subsequent lack of understanding that change was desirable was a key reason why several of them failed to meet their objectives. Under these circumstances a *"cycle of recrimination"* (Al-Qahtani, 1995 cited in Schweisfurth 2011, p. 430) may ensue in which *"... teachers blame policy-makers and administrators for unsuitable policy and lack of support, and policy-makers blame teachers for not implementing it"* (*ibid*., p. 430). To avoid such situations Dahlström (2007) champions the development of a "*participatory national strategy*" to guide the design of reform. From his work in Ethiopia, Namibia and Laos, he argues that this strategy should engage teachers and administrators in a dialogue about the need for change and the kind of change needed. Furthermore the strategy should be such that it recognises people as both implementers and co-constructors of the reforms.

(ii) Clear explication of intended complex reforms

Consideration needs to be given to the complexity of the reforms, especially the gap between current and intended practice, and the capacity of the schools to undergo change. However, whether reforms are best introduced incrementally or through programs requiring

larger steps, will depend on local and external factors (Adams *et al.,* 1997). It is also imperative that those being asked to change have a clear picture of the intended reforms. Cheng (2009) in a review of two decades of educational reform in the Asia-Pacific region, has written of the need for appropriate pacing with the introduction of reforms and of the importance of ensuring before changes are introduced that the reasons for the reforms are understood. Writing of the situation observed in one program in Hong Kong, he describes the dangers of a "*bottle-neck effect*" where too many reforms are initiated in too short a time and within a context where teachers are already under pressure.

2.2.4 'Local' factors affecting educational reform

Fullan (2007) has identified 'local' factors within schools that impact upon change. These include resourcing (Sarason, 1982; Dello-Iacovo, 2009); developing institutional capacity (Stoll, 1999); building a collegial school culture (Dewey, 1966; Rosenholtz 1989; Stoll, 1999); and having professional support from the principal (Deal & Peterson 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Most of the studies referenced above were conducted in developed countries, nonetheless the conclusions reached are relevant to reform in developing countries. These local factors impact upon the process of change rather than on its content, and should be considered within the cultural, social and political settings of the reforms.

(i) Providing resources to implement reforms

To implement educational reform successfully, the available resources need to be consistent with the anticipated outcomes; however, studies have shown that the quantity and quality of the resources allocated are often insufficient for the purpose (Sarason, 1982; Hargreaves, 1990; Thompson & Zueli, 1999). One vital resource is the time allowed to bring about change. Planned reforms often do not proceed as anticipated and it is important to allow sufficient time for flexible responses (Sarason, 1982; Dello-Iacovo, 2009).

(ii) Developing the capacity of the system to undergo change

The successful implementation of reforms also depends on developing the capacity of the system to absorb change. Stoll (1999) advances the argument that a central component of any educational reform should be to build the internal capacity of the school, while Fullan (2007) discusses the same process as changing the organisational culture. Stoll argues that it is vital that the workplace is organised in such a way that positive relationships are created between teachers,

and that teacher morale is supported. A similar position is advocated by Joyce and Showers (1995) who conclude: *"Perhaps no change is more needed than the development of social arrangements that enable educators to work supportively together to help one another reflect on teaching, and help one another make sensible changes"* (p. 164).

A further debate centres on whether change is dependent on the 'structural' or 'cultural' conditions of the system (Hargreaves, 1997). Writing about research in primary schools in the United States, Little (1981) maintained that school improvement was most possible when the school's culture changed so that between staff and principal there was *"... frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise 'talk' about teaching practice"* as well as opportunities for teachers to *"observe each other teaching"* (p. 7). A few years later Rosenholtz (1989), examining the conditions necessary for school improvement, classified schools as 'learning enriched' and 'learning impoverished'. In learning enriched schools there was a collective agreement by teachers over student-learning goals, evaluation practices emphasised improving both individual and collective teaching practices, teachers were involved in school-wide decision making, and teachers collaborated with each other over professional issues (*ibid*., pp. 72-74). More recently Hopkins (2001) arguing that the relationship between structure and culture is dialectical, warned that if too much attention was given to changing the structures without a deeper consideration of what staff were actually doing in the classroom, all that would result would be an *"appearance of change"* (p. 155). In like fashion, Huberman (1992) warns of engaging in "*trivial change*" (p. 6) while Hargreaves (1997) warns of the dangers of changing conditions so that staff are organised to work together in a state of *"contrived collegiality"* (p. 1305). Instead he advocates that staff organise their time and space so that they genuinely come to see the advantage of sharing ideas and working together. He claims, *"... it is through cultures of teaching that teachers learn what it means to teach and what kind of teacher they want to be within their school ..."* (*ibid*., p. 1306).

(iii) <u>*Building staff collaboration and collegiality*</u>

Much of the literature on building staff collaboration and collegiality derives from Dewey, who, more than a century ago, advocated that schools would benefit from the *"adoption of intellectual initiative, discussion, and decision throughout the entire school corp"* (Dewey, 1966, p. 186). Over recent years the focus on staff development has promoted strategies that involve reflection by the teacher, collaborative planning, and building pedagogic relationships to improve the response to under-achieving students (Hopkins, West, Ainscow, Harris, & Beresford, 1997).

Such strategies have been used extensively, so that by the 1990s teacher learning was seen as *"... at the heart of educational change"* (Stoll, 1999, p. 522). Creating a climate within the school that encourages teachers to talk openly about their teaching with colleagues and with the principal, and to observe each other's classroom practice, is now standard in schools in many countries[66] (Hopkins *et al*., 1997). As Darling-Hammond (2003) argues, *"... effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools – one that needs to be treasured and supported"* (p. 7).

The importance of collegiality and of a supportive environment for teachers trying to cope with change, has influenced recent studies advocating the development of professional learning communities in schools (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). However, counter perspectives warn to proceed with caution as it is possible that such professional learning communities can also work to reinforce ineffective or poor teaching practices (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Hargreaves (1995) advanced the position that while collegial school cultures might appear to be better at responding to the implementation of reforms, the final determinant would be whether student outcomes had improved. For example, McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), have shown how some teaching communities act conservatively to reinforce traditional ways of working while in others the teachers collaborate to engage in change and embrace reforms. As Fullan (2007) warns, creating collegiality and collaboration is not a simple task as it involves changing established culture. The difference between teaching communities that enforce traditional practices and those which embrace change highlights that it is necessary to have appropriate local and external conditions if educational reform is to result.

(iv) <u>The role of the principal in implementing reform</u>

One of the main local factors required for school improvement is a supportive principal. Fullan (2007) acknowledges that: *"The principal has always been the 'gatekeeper' of change, often determining the fate of innovations coming from the outside or from teacher initiatives on the inside"* (p. 74). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) also highlight that the principal has the power to foster or to hinder the building of a collegial atmosphere. Borrowing from Wenger (1998), principals are 'brokers' who can promote school reform through the negotiation of local and

[66] A recent report by the Grattan Institute shows four East Asian education systems (Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Korea) achieving significantly better student outcomes than in Australia through a *"...focus on the things that are known to matter in the classroom: a relentless, practical focus on effective learning and the creation of a strong culture of teacher education, collaboration, mentoring, feedback and sustained professional development"* (Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann, & Burns, 2012, p. 2).

external factors. The responsibility of the principal to provide leadership becomes even more crucial with calls for change to begin by developing the school's internal capacity. From case studies conducted on the role of the principal, Deal and Peterson (1993) concluded that: *"The principal shapes the underlying culture of the school"* (p. 90). However, they also put forward the case that to be effective the principal needs to first understand the existing school culture which *"... must be transformed through incremental steps that reinforce new values and new beliefs about quality and excellence"* (*ibid.,* p. 91). By challenging the low expectations some staff may hold of students, by encouraging teachers to observe and provide feedback on each other's teaching, and by creating an atmosphere of collaboration, Stoll (1999) describes the role the principal can play towards creating a positive school culture as "*pivotal*". Similarly, Hallinger and Heck (1996) in their review of studies of principal effectiveness supported the notion that the principal's leadership can influence student learning. However, they also noted that it was equally important to consider the conditions under which principals were effective. In other words, a central finding was that the school context and the staff were important to what the principal could hope to achieve.

One of the most commonly researched areas in schools in developing countries is that of the role of the principal. For example Dalin's (1994) work in Bangladesh, Columbia and Ethiopia stresses the importance of the principal as a 'change agent' who can attract followers and provide a positive role model for teachers. The critical importance of school leadership was also highlighted in research conducted in thirteen developing countries by Mpokosa and Ndaruhutse (2008).[67] The conclusion reached was that: *"the role of head teachers is crucial for improving teacher management and teacher motivation and ultimately for improving learning outcomes"* (*ibid*., p. 11). The multidimensional nature of school leadership in developing contexts is well described by Hartwell (2008) who states that the successful implementation of new programs requires leaders:

> *... who are well grounded in the practice if not the theory of educational reform and social change; who are well placed to organise political support and resources; who have the power of persuasion; who have the respect of community members and local authorities; and who have a commitment to assure children's learning.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 158)

[67] This research, commissioned by Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) and the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) Education Trust, focused on teacher management in Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guyana, India, Malawi, Maldives, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia.

2.2.5 'External' factors affecting educational reform

The next set of factors which influence the implementation of educational reform are those which have their origins 'external' to the school. They include factors identified by Fullan (2007) on the role of government and of other agencies that provide professional support to the schools.

(i) The support role of government and other agencies

In any discussion of educational reform a major factor to consider is the role played by the bureaucracy, that is by the government agencies that control the administration of education, especially their role in seeing that change matches need. As Fullan (2007) notes *"...whether or not implementation occurs will depend on the congruence between the reforms and local needs, and how the changes are introduced and followed through"* (p. 99). In earlier work Fullan (1992) described the difficulties which district and provincial authorities often encountered as they attempted to support change in schools. Fifteen years later he was still advocating the development of appropriate relationships between the bureaucracy and the schools (Fullan, 2007, p. 100). Research by McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) has shown that when district authorities take the time to support principals to implement change, there is a strong positive impact on the schools. They assert that *"... the district is the system context of greatest significance for teacher's school based learning communities"* (*ibid*., p. 116). Stoll (1999) also puts forward the case that external agency support is instrumental to the development of the schools' capacity to undergo change. She identifies five ways in which external agencies can provide support: (i) by respecting the professionalism of the teachers and upholding their conditions of service; (ii) by encouraging professional development; (iii) by helping schools interpret and use data; (iv) by offering 'critical friendship' based on trust and respect; and, (v) by ensuring that coordination occurs with other relevant government agencies (*ibid*., pp. 521-523).

(ii) Providing professional support in developing contexts

In developed countries professional support originating from within the bureaucracy is generally available to schools; however, in developing systems similar support is often unavailable. In developing contexts staff at district and provincial levels tend to function exclusively as inspectors and administrators, and may themselves need support if they are to develop the ability to assist teachers with their classroom practice. Dalin (1994), writing of such systems, notes that a country's central agency needs to provide support to staff at the provincial and district levels to the degree that then enables them to assist the teachers. However, Dalin also

notes that at these organisational levels staff are often fearful of and resistant to change. It is not easy to shift entrenched attitudes of staff who have been working in the same position for long periods within a strongly hierarchical system, nor to develop their pedagogical skills.

2.2.6 'Intervening' factors affecting educational reform

More elusive 'intervening' factors that influence reform, identified by Adams *et al*., (1997), include issues of authority and power, and communication and participation. These are now examined.

(i) Authority and power to enact reforms

The complex issue of power and authority is a key factor influencing the change process. In an examination in England of the changing nature of the power relations between teachers and management brought about in the late 1980s by 'market-based' reforms, Ball (1994) describes how principals were transformed into financial managers and became detached from their classroom-based colleagues. He notes that shifting forms of power relations:

> *...are realised and reproduced through social interaction, within the everyday life of institutions. They do not so much bear down upon as take shape within the practices of the institution itself and construct individuals and their social relations through direct interaction.*
>
> (*ibid.,* p. 64)

Ball further argues that in the climate created by the reforms, there was a danger collegial relationships would be replaced by surveillance, and professionalism by accountability. Teachers were *"... increasingly an absent presence in the discourses of education policy, an object rather than a subject of discourse"* (*ibid*., p. 50).

The bureaucracies responsible for implementing educational reform are typically dominated by hierarchical relationships. Such patterns are difficult to shift and generally require a cultural change across the entire educational system. Schweisfurth (2011), in her examination of attempts to introduce learner-centred methodologies, takes up the issue of authority within hierarchical relationships. However, as Ball's (1994) study shows, oppressive situations also exist in developed countries and teachers' voices become diminished accordingly. Hartwell (2008) also writes about authoritative relationship patterns which can exist between the bureaucracy and

the schools and warns that these are often mirrored within schools between the principal and teachers. Implementing reform at the school level may first require changes in the communication and participation practices within the bureaucracy. In summary, Adams *et al.,* (1997) assert that, *"... the key to full and lasting implemented change lies not with strict hierarchies of authority and rigid routines of operation, but with building and maintaining acceptable, satisfying human relationships"* (p. 3).

(ii) Communication within reforms

One of the major changes in the educational systems of many developing countries has been increased devolution of authority and power to schools. Dalin (1994) is a strong advocate of decentralisation arguing that by sharing responsibilities and decision-making, the bureaucracy is able to improve the participation of the schools and their commitment to reform. Sarason (1982) and Fullan (1982, 2007) have similarly promoted decentralisation in developed countries, arguing that those who are to be affected by reform need to be involved in the planning and implementation of change. In Sarason's (1982) words, *"... only through such involvement can [staff] become committed to the change"* (p. 294).

A common accompaniment of decentralisation is the not unreasonable demand by the bureaucracy for accountability. Decentralisation therefore also comes with the need for improved information systems (Adams *et al.,* 1997). For example, UNESCO in their EFA Global Monitoring Report (2004) assert that any reform to improve education needs to be accompanied by systems which strengthen accountability and combat corruption. Typically these systems will require the collection and collation of a welter of educational data for administrative and planning purposes. They should also incorporate effective feedback mechanisms (Adams *et al*., 1997) so there is a two-way flow of reliable information between teachers and principals and between schools and higher authorities. Data which travels back to the classroom to stimulate reflection, allows teachers to consider its implications and to plan appropriate action (Schubert & Prouty-Harris, 2003). Motala (2001) notes that one of the central challenges to educational reform in South Africa is to work out how to use information collected so that it is not just an empty 'counting numbers exercise' for reporting purposes, but rather that the data is analysed and the findings fed back to the people at the provincial, district and school levels so they can be openly discussed and acted upon. Such open communications are critical to the successful implementation of educational reforms (Rosenholtz, 1989; Adams *et al*., 1997).

However, it should not be forgotten that decentralisation of the decision-making processes may give rise to negative reactions. Gottelmann-Duret (2000) highlights this issue and warns that decentralisation is often accompanied by political interference from those who are loath to give up power. In his study, in China, Steinmuller (2011) describes how in some situations, decentralisation generates a process of 'complicity' where schools and local authorities are reluctant to report authentic figures to the 'outsiders' in the bureaucracy, for fear of criticism or retribution.

2.2.7 Cultural considerations

A number of writers have considered the relevance of culture to the process of educational change. Stephens (2007), with extensive experience in cross-cultural settings, defines culture as "*the knowledge and ideas that give meaning to the beliefs and actions of individuals and societies*" (*ibid*., p. 27) and argues that culture is *"at the heart of the education development process*" (*ibid*., p. 25). Peterson and Deal (2009), have considered culture in the context of school improvement. For their purposes the importance of culture is that it *"influences and shapes the way teachers, students, and administrators think, feel and act"* (*ibid*., pp. 9-10). Dimmock and Walker (2000) recognise the way societal culture can influence the implementation of educational reform and argue that it can "*act as a mediator or filter to the spread of ideas and practices across the globe, resulting in their adoption, adaptation or even rejection"* (p. 304). In this current study culture appears in two guises – first, as the 'culture of the Lao people', and second, as the 'culture of the school'. While these are different entities they are intricately linked and both forms need to be considered in any discussion of the implementation of reform.

'Culture', in the sense of 'the culture of a people', is central to the social sciences, but no one conceptualization has gained total acceptance. In its original formulation it was a catch-all description for the entire way of life of a people (for example, Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952) and of little analytic use. Here the term is used in a more restricted sense referring only to the ideational realm. Rather than being a "*map of behaviours*", of observable phenomena, material objects, of events, it is a "*map for behaviour*" (Peterson, 1979, p. 159). This usage, from cultural anthropology, sits comfortably alongside Bruner's (1996) statement that: "*Culture shapes mind ... it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conception of our selves and our powers*" (p. x). Those who would implement educational reforms need to take account of the cultural sensitivities that encompass their proposals. In most cases the

reformer will share the culture of those undergoing change, but when the reform comes from 'outside', for example through an international aid donor, the situation is problematic. In such cases Anthony's (1994) observation is worth remembering: "*It is in the nature of culture to be unperceived by those who share it and difficult to penetrate by those who do not"* (p. 52).

A cultural characteristic central to the Lao is *'kieng jai'*, commonly translated as 'consideration of others'. Little has been published on this topic in Laos; however, the equivalent Thai characteristic of *'kreng jai'* has been described by several writers (Komin, 1990; Redmond, 1998; Klausner, 1997). Holmes, Tangtongtavy and Tomizawa (1996) summarise *'kreng jai'* as: a compliance to the wishes or requests of others; reluctance to disturb others; restraining any show of displeasure or anger so as not to upset others; avoidance of asserting opinions or needs; reluctance to give instructions or pass orders to a superior; reluctance to evaluate the performance of a colleague or a superior; reluctance to ask questions to clarify misunderstandings (pp. 47-48). Such Lao cultural behaviours aimed at 'saving face' and 'avoiding criticism' (Kislenko, 2009) have implications for inter-personal relationships and thus of reform in educational settings.

Extensive work by Hofstede (2001) has shown that cultural characteristics can be expressed at national levels, influencing the behaviour of societies and organisations, including educational institutions.[68] In Hofstede's (1984) terms: *"Culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values"* (p. 52). His 'cultural dimensions' theory provides a systematic framework for assessing and differentiating national and organisational cultures tested against empirical data. Within his framework 'high power distance' refers to the degree to which less powerful members of a society or institution (such as a school) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally, while the 'individualist/collectivist' dimension refers to the degree of interdependence a society or institution (such as a school) maintains among its members. In 'individualist' societies people primarily look after themselves and their family while in 'collectivist' societies people belong to 'in-groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 2012).

[68] Hofstede's work has not gone unchallenged. While he has acquired a number of detractors (DiMaggio, 1997; Schwartz, 1999; McSweeney, 2000), Jones (2007b) maintains that "*a greater argument exists which support Hofstede than exists which dispute his work. Although, not all of what Hofstede has said stands up to public enquiry, the majority of his findings, have weathered the storms of time, and will continue to guide multi-national practitioners into the 'global' future"* (p. 1).

Drawing on this framework, Schweisfurth (2011) argues that many developing countries attempting educational reform are 'collectivist' and exhibit 'high power distance'. In these/such cultural contexts teachers "*are expected to obey authorities"* and even if they are unable or unwilling to implement reform they are more likely *"... to feign intentions and success"* (*ibid*., p. 428). Stephen's (2007) description of Lao culture as "*growing out of traditions of obedience and consensus*" (p. 43), parallels similar values identified through 'cultural dimensions' theory for Thailand. If, with all the obvious caveats, Thailand is taken as a proxy for Laos,[69] then Laos, too, is a 'collectivist' culture with 'high power distance' between its members.

In this study 'the culture of the school' is used to refer to a school's characteristics, a usage that has been common since the late 1980s (Prosser 1999). However, Prosser also argues that there has been insufficient precision in the use of the term with the result that its meaning remains problematic. In an attempt to clear away some of the analytic fog Prosser makes several distinctions. First, schools "*do not exist within a vacuum*" (*ibid*., p. 8) and that the national or 'wider' culture works to shape all schools. Second, there is a 'generic' culture of the school, a particular institutional group distinguished by *"similarities in terms of norms, structures, rituals and traditions, common values and actions"* and underpinned by a shared vision of purpose (*ibid*., p. 8). Third, because school participants possess "*a degree of freedom of choice and the capacity to interpret and reinterpret the generic culture of schools*" they each create their own particular and therefore 'unique' school culture (*ibid*., p. 8). The current discussion in this section is of the need to allow for cultural considerations in the implementation of school reform. In this regard Prosser's claim is important: *"School culture, especially in its generic form, is very difficult to change because it is shaped by values that are communally agreed, deeply embedded and taken-for-granted"* (*ibid*., p. 9).

[69] While Laos is not among the 93 countries where the empirical data that supports cultural dimensions theory was collected, neighbouring Thailand was included, which, in many ways (ethnically, linguistically, socially, and in terms of religion), is culturally very similar to Laos. For example North East Thailand, or 'Isan', which is adjacent to Champasak Province in Laos where the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, has five times as many ethnic Lao who speak Lao as their first language, than does Laos itself. Lao, or one of its dialects, is spoken by approximately 20 million people in Thailand, or about one third of the population. This situation has resulted from the vagaries of conquest, colonialism and border disputes in the 19th and 20th Centuries as well as from displacement after the 1975 revolution in Laos when it is estimated that nearly a third of the Lao people fled across the Mekong into Thailand (Evans, 1999).

2.2.8 Customising educational reform

Within the school improvement literature there is general agreement that there is no universal strategy for action, but rather, that strategies should be tailored to meet the different needs of schools in different circumstances. (Hopkins & Harris, 1997; Stoll, 1999; Saunders *et al*., 2000; Hopkins, 2001; UNESCO, 2004; Fullan, 2007). For example, in schools where there are high numbers of students not attending or under-achieving, external support may be required to help the staff establish *"...a clear and direct focus on a limited number of basic curriculum and organisational issues"* (Hopkins & Harris, 1997, p. 150). Similarly Stoll (1999) argues that for these kinds of schools, external support is needed to help teachers and principals to develop motivation and confidence to engage in implementing change. This is a particularly important step when staff have tried to effect change but seen no improvement in student learning. On the other hand, schools which are achieving and which display a culture conducive to learning, might be able to design their own improvement strategies with limited external assistance. Stoll (1999) notes that *"... any reform strategies thrust on teachers without taking account of unique differences between schools in the influences on their internal capacity, are likely to lead to loss of the energy and creativity needed to take schools forward*" (pp. 526-527). In other words, school improvement may be achieved when staff development is integrated into plans that recognise the needs of the school (Fullan, 1992).

Dalin's (1994) advice to policy makers and bureaucrats in developing contexts seeking to improve their schools is that: *"... the criteria of national commitment, local capacity building and linkage needs to be executed in a configuration that makes sense for the particular country"* (p.xviii). In developing countries, where a shortage of people with professional qualifications and expertise is likely, developing local capacity may need to be undertaken not only in the schools but also with the staff in the district and provincial offices and possibly even with those in central ministerial positions. And Motala (2001) from a South African perspective, advocates working with local change agents because "*mandated change, even when it is positive, often fails because it ignores the culture and context of the schools where change is meant to occur*" (p. 63).

2.2.9 Implementing educational reform in Lao PDR

Educational reform can be considered from several theoretical perspectives. For example, social order theory portrays reform as a process built on consensus where ineffective policies gradually disappear and give rise to more effective approaches (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). Alternatively, from the perspective of conflict theory (Mills, 1959; Sears, 2008), reform is driven by dissent. Writing from within this paradigm, Huberman (1992) describes educational reform as *"political ... one that involves conflict"* (p. 16)*,* arguing that what is considered as support by one group of stakeholders is likely to be perceived as intrusiveness by others.

In similar vein Steiner-Khamsi (2000) exploring international educational borrowing and transfer, discusses educational reform in terms of 'contestation'. The contested nature of reform often becomes apparent when educational reform is funded by foreign donors, as is the case with much development aid in Laos. Having 'foreign experts'[70] on the implementation and advisory teams of large externally funded education projects, is usually a requirement of the donors' funding conditions. These outsiders bring with them cultural values and ways of working that are different from those in the host country and implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) 'struggle' with the 'insiders', the local elites charged by government with the responsibility of implementing reforms, and who have their own cultural backgrounds and their own, often highly personal, political agendas. Contestation may also be apparent at the local level where there are usually competing ideas about how to respond to 'foreign' ideas and 'diverse educational interests'.

While the Government of Lao is attempting to meet its international commitments to the Second Millennium Development Goal,[71] recent figures suggest that its schools are actually experiencing decreasing enrolments and increasing attrition rates (SREAC, 2011).[72] In this context, the urgency of understanding how to bring about change that will promote authentic learning in schools has become increasingly important. However, helping schools to improve student learning outcomes is a formidable task that will involve more than the issuing of decrees[73] and the dissemination of checklists.

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[70] The author was employed in Laos as a 'foreign expert' or 'specialist' under contract to the Lao Governement through Opifer, an international consultancy firm, for a period of six years.

[71] Millennium Development Goal 2 (MDG2) is: "*To achieve universal primary education by 2015".*

[72] Research conducted jointly by the MoE Department of Primary and Preschool Education (DPPE) and the Strategy Research and Education Analysis Centre (SREAC), established in 2011.

[73] A decree is an authoritative statement or policy that has not attained the full stature of law (Adams, Hwa Kee & Lin, 2001).

Adams, Hwa Kee and Lin (2001) have observed Lao education as 'outsiders'. In their study linking research, policy and strategic planning to education development, they identify several weaknesses at the heart of the reform process in Laos. With respect to education reform they claim that none of the processes of planning, decision-making, or negotiation are transparent, and that outside the highest political and bureaucratic circles, stakeholders are excluded from involvement in any major decisions. This approach, they argue, is typified by the way in which debate or critique on policy is effectively stifled once a ministerial decree on the subject has been issued. In general, they depict policy development as a non-transparent process centred on the agenda derived from the Party.[74] Similar assertions regarding a lack of transparency have been reported by Stephens (2007) and Stuart-Fox (2008). Common observations documented by such 'outsiders' are the lack of transparency in decision making, the overriding power of the LPRP over decisions made by government, and the reluctance (or inability) of lower and middle level public officials to openly engage in policy debate.

While foreign observers can provide insights into the system which Lao people work within, it is Lao themselves who must find the strategies to implement change and improvements.[75] Suggestions on how to navigate through the hierarchical structures which dominate public life in Laos are provided by Kittiphanh (2011) who, while recognising the limitations suggests that:

> *It is possible to lessen these boundaries in the system by establishing good networks and relationships. In the Lao context, personal networks and relationships are critical tools because they create a relationship of trust and mutual support. Relationships are the currency of business and social life in the Lao PDR. In order to get things done, personal contacts and family relationships are drawn upon in almost all aspects of daily life.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 57)

Another critical issue in the reform process is that of leadership, which in Laos is always subservient to the ideology of the LPRP. This issue has been cautiously raised by a group of Lao educators[76] who discuss how leadership can assist educational reform (Chan, Correia, Kim Anh,

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74 The "Party" refers to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) which maintains tight control in Laos across all levels of political life and governance, as well as across many aspects of civil society. See also Section 1.1.3.

75 This thesis concludes with 15 recommendations in the hope that they will be considered by Lao officials charged with reforming teacher education in Laos.

76 These ideas were discussed during a three month fellowship program on 'leadership' sponsored in 2007 by AusAID and the Australian Catholic University (see Chan *et al*., 2008).

Frawley, Inthasone, Kittiphanh & Prasonexay, 2008). They use the metaphor of a 'candle' to describe how leadership is exerted in Laos: the light of the candle represents a leader who holds a clear vision, who can inspire others and yet who can be flexible, working against adversity to maintain a 'flame' but who can be blown out with a puff. To survive and prosper in Laos as a leader requires a diverse range of skills, but above all else, membership in the Party. Teachers, principals and district and provincial staff understand that as employees of the state, and in many cases as members of the Party, their first responsibility is to uphold the ideology of the Party. Those in authority who are responsible for reform, and who recognise the difficulty that junior officials have in giving direct opinions, need to create processes which allow for authentic participation within a 'consensus' approach aimed at incremental change (Kittiphanh, 2011).

Lao educators are beginning to recognise that *"middle ways"* need to be found (*ibid*., p.56), which not only draw upon Lao cultural strengths, but which, at the same time, minimise some of the more restrictive practices that currently exist in the Lao education bureaucracy and in primary schools. In the preface to a collection of professional articles written by Lao educators, Sundgren (2008a) makes the point:

> *... a future challenge is to find reform strategies that are neither uncritically implementing favoured ideas in western educational philosophy and discourse, nor adhering to traditional practice, but rather taking in* [*sic*] *account the specific context, culture, language and general conditions of Laos*.
>
> (*ibid*., p. 5)

Educational ideas can be borrowed, but once considered in specific and different contexts, they will be transformed (Alexander, 2000). Similarly, Steiner-Khamsi (2000) comments: *"... the successful implementation of borrowed ideas and practices involves indigenisation and cultural adaptation"* (p. 174), and this is the challenge for all involved in planning and implementing educational reform in Laos.

2.2.10 Summary

The literature reviewed above highlights that if reforms are to be implemented successfully, a number of factors need to be considered. Many of the studies have been conducted in rich, developed countries and some may query whether such research has anything to offer a study situated in a country where resources are so limited. However, it is argued that these studies provide salient reminders of the factors which should be considered by those engaged in reform. At the broader level, the literature underlines the role of government to ensure that all stakeholders understand the reforms and are supported to participate in their implementation. Ball (1994) and Adams *et al*., (1997) direct attention to the importance of power relations and the potential for them to influence decision-making processes. The studies also show the importance of developing supportive school cultures, of investing resources to enhance the skills of principals, and of investing in professional development so that staff can participate in educational change (Stoll, 1999; Harris, 2000).

Studies conducted in developing contexts raise concerns about the applicability of education transfer (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). These studies highlight that national characteristics and local culture both affect and are affected by the ideas which are implemented as reforms (Alexander, 2000; Stephens, 2007; Dimmock & Walker, 2000). This issue has been noted by Lao educators (Kittiphanh, 2011) who advocate charting a 'middle way', building on Lao cultural strengths while minimising some of the more negative political and social characteristics of the education system. What emerges from the review is the central role that teachers play in educational change. As Avalos (2000) argues, the reform process needs to do more than direct or inform teachers; it also needs to accord them agency. If beginning teachers in Laos are to successfully participate and engage in the reform agenda articulated in government policies, they need to be supported to do so (Anderson, 2010). One way of doing this is to provide appropriate training and professional development.

The chapter now turns to the third area for review: the education and professional experiences of beginning teachers.

2.3 Beginning Teachers

The preceding section of the chapter, 'educational reform', dealt with the process of change. A number of the studies that were reviewed attested that as part of that process *"serious and sustained teacher learning"* needs to be embedded *"at the centre of school reform"* (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1014). Internationally, as developing countries struggle to meet their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the focus on teacher education and professional development has intensified (UNESCO 2004; 2010) with learning to teach now regarded as a continuous process that extends across a teacher's entire professional career (Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2005).

This final area of the review examines the literature on the education of beginning teachers and their response to teaching. In line with the central focus of this study, the professional experiences of beginning teachers in Lao PDR, studies within developing country contexts are emphasised. The section is divided into eleven broad topics for review. It begins with a discussion of the literature on the 'vulnerability' of beginning teachers and on associated 'stage theories' of teacher development (2.3.1), before examining the influence formative experiences have on how beginning teachers perceive their role in the classroom (2.3.2). Studies which have identified 'coping strategies' for teachers are explored (2.3.3), the application of socio-cultural theory to learning in the workplace is discussed (2.3.4), and then approaches to formal pre-service teacher education are considered (2.3.5). The literature on 'effective' pre-service teacher education is appraised (2.3.6) followed by the literature on the professional practice component of pre-service courses (2.3.7). Relevant sections of the literature on workplace support programs (2.3.8), and on mentoring (2.3.9), are examined next. The final topics in the section examine the challenges of providing effective teacher education and professional support for beginning teachers in developing countries (2.3.10), and, through a limited number of studies, for teachers in the Lao PDR (2.3.11).

2.3.1 Beginning Teachers: The reality of the classroom

For over thirty years studies have been conducted in developed countries investigating how beginning teachers react to the responsibilities of teaching. These studies were prompted by concerns about falling teacher retention rates and by concerns that schools were not meeting the needs of their students. It was also widely recognised that proposed reforms needed to be based

on empirical studies that reflected both the 'school reality' (Lortie, 1975) and the behaviour of teachers (Lacey, 1977). While some have been large-scale quantitative studies designed to show broad trends (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Veenman, 1984), recently a number of qualitative case studies have provided contextual understandings of teachers' experiences (Bullough, 1989; Calderhead & Shorrock,1997; Flores, 2001).

(i) The difficulties faced by beginning teachers in developed contexts

One of the earliest studies on beginning teachers was undertaken by Lortie (1975). His description of the transition from student-teacher to beginning teacher as 'abrupt' and his claim that beginning teachers either 'sink or swim' highlight the difficulties which many new teachers encounter at the start of their careers. In a similar study Lacey (1977) concluded that, *"The new teacher is pre-occupied with the basic problems of survival and acceptance. The strain of being new is in itself considerable"* (p. 137). Then, Veenman (1984) in a major review of the research on beginning teachers,[77] described them as 'vulnerable' and subject to 'reality shock'. Of the 24 problems he identified as being most commonly experienced by beginning teachers, four stand out - maintaining classroom discipline, motivating students to complete learning tasks, coping with individual differences, and assessing students' work. Later studies also support these findings Reynolds 1995; Stokking, Leenders, De Jong & Van Tartwijk, 2003; Grudnoff & Tuck, 2005).

(ii) The difficulties faced by beginning teachers in developing contexts

Over the past decade, as international donors have increased their aid to help developing countries improve the quality of schools and the quality of teaching, a number of studies have examined the challenges faced by classroom teachers (Henning, 2000 in South Africa; Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002 in Ghana; Belay, Ghebreab, Ghebremichael, Ghebreselassie, Homes & White, 2007 in Eritrea; and, Westbrook, Shah, Durrani, Tickly, Khan & Dunne, 2009 in Pakistan). While some of the problems identified by Veenman are common in both developed and developing contexts, in the latter situations the difficulties encountered tend to be of a different kind: the physical condition of the schools, large classes, limited teaching resources, rural isolation, tired and hungry pupils, and low teacher morale. Other problems for new teachers were meeting the reporting requirements (Vavrus, 2009 in Tanzania) and being unable to

[77] Veenman (1984) reviewed 83 studies of beginning teachers in developed countries - the United States (55), West Germany (7), United Kingdom (6), Netherlands (5), Australia (4), Canada (2), Austria (2), Switzerland (1) and Finland (1).

implement the learner-centred methods prescribed as national educational reforms (O'Sullivan, 2004 in Namibia; Barrett, 2007 in Tanzania; and, Mtika & Gates, 2010 in Malawi).

(iii) Stage theories of beginning teacher development

Some studies of the professional development of beginning teachers described their adjustment to their new roles in terms of phases or developmental stages through which newly qualified teachers pass (Huberman, Thompson & Weiland, 1997). Early studies in this tradition (Fuller, 1969) were structured around the perceived concerns of the beginning teacher in which *"... concern reflects feelings of lacking the competence needed to conduct new educational activities in a responsible manner"* (van den Berg, 2002, p. 593). Fuller and Bown (1975) proposed a three stage model: (i) survival concerns, when the teacher is focused on his or her own ability to manage the class and typically blames the students, the physical conditions or the level of the resources for any perceived shortcomings; (ii) teaching concerns, when the teacher is focused on teaching methods and materials; and, (iii) student learning concerns, when the teacher is focused on the impact of his or her teaching on student learning. Beginning teachers are depicted as moving through the stages sequentially and moving on to the next stage only once the preceding area of concern has been resolved.

A recent study[78] in Eritrea by Belay *et al*., (2007) also defined developmental stages but came to different conclusions. Adopting concepts originally formulated by Habermas (1976), their analysis generated a three-stage framework of levels of teacher development: (i) technical level, when the teacher is focused on delivering lessons; (ii) interpretive level, when the teacher resolves his or her problems in reflective ways; and, (iii) emancipatory level, when the teacher is able to draw on his or her own expertise to resolve challenges. Their study highlights that some teachers do not progress but remain fixed at the technical level, and this is used to argue the case for the provision of support programs. Lacey (1977), Berliner (1994), and Moir (1999), among others, have advanced their own developmental schemata through which teachers are said to either progress or stagnate. Such studies have also provided the rationale for the development of support programs in the early years of a teacher's career. This proposal is discussed further in Section 2.3.8.

[78] Belay *et al*., (2007) examined the professional development of seven beginning teachers in Eritrea over a four-year period.

(iv) The limitations of stage theories of beginning teacher development

While stage theories have been useful in raising awareness of the need for professional development programs, concerns have been expressed that the models over-simplify the complexities of the beginning teacher experience. As a result of extended research (van den Berg, 2002, p. 594), the personal development of the new teacher is today more likely to be expressed in terms of career phases such as 'student', 'novice', 'experienced' and 'nestor'[79] (IVLOS, 2008, p. 2). Although Pigge and Marso (1997) confirmed some of the earlier findings by Fuller and Bown (1975), they suggest that *"... the development of teaching concerns may not follow a lock-step pattern, but rather may vary for individuals"* (p. 234). Bullough and Baughman (1993) also caution that placing too much reliance on stage theories can introduce *"distortion"* (p. 94), while Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) warn against using stage theories to explain complex teacher behaviours: *"... the diversity of routes in becoming a teacher is wide, the people and the situations involved are different, and attempts to reduce learning to a few stages inevitably remain broad generalizations"* (p. 186). Bullough (1989) also rejecting stage theory explanations, argues that: *"Human development defies easy categorization. It is seldom smooth, never conflict free, and frequently characterized by backsliding"* (p. 17).

(v) Beyond stage theories of beginning teacher development

In opposition to stage theories, Zeichner and Teitelbaum (1982) called for more *"political"* accounts of the experiences of beginning teachers, with Veenman (1984) and Avalos (1993) both pointing to the usefulness of biographical narrative, case study and ethnographic research methods to provide the background and contextual understandings which surround the concerns and problems which beginning teachers undoubtedly have. These methodologies provide valuable insights into the socialisation of beginning teachers into their new craft, a process generally understood in terms of the interaction between three key variables: the teachers' beliefs and predispositions to teaching, the knowledge and skills acquired in the pre-service program, and, the workplace context (Flores & Day, 2006). It is the dynamic interplay of the beliefs, knowledge and skills of the individual within a specific work context (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985) that results in the socialisation of the teacher within the school.

[79] The term 'nestor' is used in the IVLOS (2008) report to refer to the final mature stage in a teacher's career.

2.3.2 Beginning Teachers: The influence of formative experiences

The formative experiences of beginning teachers are commonly categorised as those related to biography, for example prior learning experiences, prior teaching experiences, and former teachers as exemplars, both positive and negative (Knowles, 1992; Goodson, 1992). This topic addresses studies that are focused on the influence of biographical factors on the professional development of trainee-teachers and beginning teachers.

(i) Beginning teacher development through the lens of formative experiences

The way the personal histories of beginning teachers influence their beliefs about teaching, have been recognised as having a major effect on subsequent teaching practice. This literature asserts that by the time young people commence teacher training, their beliefs about education have already been shaped, in large measure due to their own experiences of school (Lortie, 1975; Kennedy, 1991b; Stofflett & Stoddart, 1994). Knowles (1992), through a series of five case studies, investigated the influence of positive and negative biographical experiences on the identities and images of teaching held by trainee-teachers. He concluded that beginning teachers who had had positive learning experiences at school were able to engage more productively when faced with challenges in their classrooms. Similarly Calderhead and Shorrock (1997), drawing upon case studies conducted in England, concluded that many trainee-teachers already held clear views and beliefs about how teachers should act which *"... frequently originated from the students' own experiences as pupils at school and were commonly modelled on one or two particular teachers who stood out in their memories"* (*ibid*., pp. 155-56).

Flores (2001) has extended the research from trainee-teachers to beginning teachers and demonstrated the influence of biographical factors on the way teachers relate to their students and to teaching, while Nespor (1987) takes the research a step further again, highlighting how teachers' beliefs are formulated from disparate sources including *"existential presumptions", "affective and evaluative aspects", "personal experiences, episodes or events"* and in some cases from desires to seek *"alternative realities"* to those they had themselves experienced at school (*ibid*., pp. 318-320). Overall, it is the beliefs which have developed during 'formative experiences' that create the lens through which beginning teachers view and interpret their teaching (Knowles, 1992).

(ii) Recognising the backgrounds of student-teachers

Formative experiences, Barnes (1989) claims, can make the task of pre-service educators even more difficult as many trainee-teachers enter college believing that they already know how to teach. She argues that teacher-educators need to see what trainee-teachers already think about teaching: "*The challenge for teacher-educators is to create programs of initial preparation that develop the beginner's inclination and capacity to engage in the sort of intellectual dialogue and principled action required for effective teaching"* (p. 13).

Goodson (1992) was one of the first to advance the importance of understanding the prior experiences of trainee-teachers. He asked trainee-teachers to write educational autobiographies to help them make public their personal educational experiences. Similarly, Bullough, Knowles and Crow (1992) advocated the writing of life histories in teacher education programs so as to *"...begin with 'who' the teacher is and with 'how' he or she conceives of himself or herself as teacher"* (p. 195). Others, such as Bullough and Gitlin (2001) make the case for recognising the backgrounds of trainee-teachers, asserting that what new teachers learn in their course is filtered through their biographically embedded assumptions and beliefs. They argue for the value of encouraging trainee-teachers to discuss their previous learning experiences and beliefs, acknowledging that: *"Ignoring the past does not make it go away. It lingers, ever present and quietly insistent"* (*ibid*., p. 221).

(iii) Investigating the value of pre-service education

In light of the strong influence of these formative experiences on subsequent teaching practice, a number of authors have considered the limitations of pre-service education. In a review of 40 studies of trainee-teachers, Kagan (1992) showed that the beliefs and images they held as to what constituted 'good' teaching had been in large measure shaped by their experiences in school as learners and from their evaluations of their own teachers as role models for practice. Moreover, Kagan showed that teacher education programs had a limited effect on modifying such views. Feimen-Nemser (2001) argues that pre-service education is but *"... a weak intervention compared with the influence of teachers' own schooling and their on-the-job experience"* (p. 1014). This situation, which Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) described as *"washed out knowledge"* (p. 7), was also evident in American, English, German and Scandinavian studies reviewed by Jordell (1987) and by Rust (1994). Both writers concluded that knowledge and skills learnt in pre-service programs soon 'faded' once teachers entered the real

world of schools. Jordell (1987) argued that teachers only retained college learning if it complimented the *"practice-generated theories"* (p. 176) which they developed as they interacted in the schools. Similarly Tafa (2004), in an ethnographic study of seven newly qualified teachers in Botswana, concluded that once teachers started work, college ideas disappeared and that they soon reverted to following the ways they had been taught at school themselves. They also followed the immediate examples of the way their colleagues taught. In a similar study, Westbrook *et al*., 2009, working with novice teachers in Pakistan found that while there was not a complete 'wash-out' effect there was a major disjunction between learning in the pre-service course and the practices actually adopted in schools as the beginning teachers discarded newly learnt ways in order to fit in with the existing school milieu.

In contrast to the position that what is learnt in pre-service education is readily 'washed out', there are other studies which suggest that effective pre-service education can have a long-term positive influence on the teaching practices of new teachers. For example, Gunstone, Slattery, Baird and Northfield (1993) tracked 13 beginning science teachers over a three-year period after they had completed a one-year diploma course. All the teachers reported that their constructivist-based course which aimed at improving personal reflection and practice, had positively influenced their own approach to teaching. Loughran (1996), in a study, which followed the professional growth of 17 beginning teachers over the first three years of their teaching, undertook, in part, to capture the perceptions held by the group of their pre-service course, one also based on constructivist principles. After two years of teaching the large majority of the teachers reported that the course had shaped their pedagogy and continued to guide their teaching. And Brouwer and Korthagen (2005), in a three-year longitudinal study of 357 beginning teachers in the Netherlands, reported that a majority of the teachers stated that the integration of theory and practice in their pre-service program had made a positive impact on their teaching.

The studies referenced in the last two paragraphs show a mixture of findings with respect to the influence and long-term benefits of pre-service education, making it dangerous to draw any generalised conclusions. This, however, should come as no surprise, as what constitutes 'pre-service education' can vary markedly from course to course and from country to country, and therefore the studies may well be examining the effects of very different artefacts. A common criticism of many of the studies that have attempted to document the outcomes of pre-service

programs is that often the descriptions of the course philosophy, content and organisational features are too sketchy making it impossible to arrive at any valid assessment of the teachers' practices in relation to what was taught (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). The issue for this study, examined later, is the effectiveness of the teacher training colleges in Laos. Are the training experiences of the beginning teachers quickly 'washed out' when confronted with the realities of the school, or are they equipped by their training to meet all challenges? While Brouwer and Korthagen (2005) are among those who argue that pre-service education can positively support a beginning teacher's emerging practice, they nonetheless acknowledge the strong socialising forces of school context which work to modify teachers' behaviours and beliefs. The next section of this chapter examines the literature on contextual influences in the workplace.

2.3.3 Beginning Teachers: The influence of context

While studies of teacher socialisation written from the functionalist tradition portrayed beginning teachers as *"...passive entities who willingly adapt and conform to forces of socialisation"* (Graber, 1996, p. 452), it is now accepted that the teacher is an active agent interacting in the workplace. Ethnographic case studies by Lacey (1977), Bullough (1989), Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) and Flores (2001), have contributed to an increased understanding of how political, social and cultural factors in the workplace affect the ways beginning teachers engage in teaching. Day (1999) for example, describes the adjustment experience of beginning teachers as a:

> *... two-way struggle in which teachers try to create their own social reality by attempting to make their work match their personal vision of how it should be, whilst at the same time being subjected to powerful socialising forces of the school culture*.
>
> (*ibid*., pp. 59-60)

Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) writing from a developed country context view such socialising forces are the *"...taken-for-granted practices within the school, and the expectations of teachers, children, headteachers, college tutors or parents"* (p. 174). Similar perspectives regarding socialising forces are evident in studies conducted by Barrett (2007) in Tanzania, Sriprakash (2010) in India, and Mtika and Gates (2010) in Malawi.

(i) Understanding beginning teachers through a micro-political perspective

Some of the studies aimed at understanding the impact of contextual factors on beginning teachers, have been undertaken using *"micro-political"* perspectives, pioneered by Ball (1987). Blase (1997) claims that through this approach analyses can be made of *"... how individuals and groups use power to protect themselves and to advance their interests in conflictive, cooperative, collegial and democratic relationships"* (p. 962). He identifies the individual groups with whom beginning teachers need to negotiate to further their interests (administrators, the principal, colleagues, students, parents) and shows that while beginning teachers typically attempt to 'get on with' members of each group, it is the administrators who are the group 'to please'. In other words, understanding the hierarchical powers in the school is a prerequisite for 'survival'. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) argue that using the micro-political perspective to analyse teachers' concerns and strategies can bring fresh viewpoints to the foreground. For example, in their study conducted in Belgium, they show that a focus by beginning teachers on 'discipline' is often linked more to a concern about pleasing the 'hierarchy' and being seen by significant others as being a 'proper teacher' than to any concern for managing the class so that students learn. A similar finding is evident in two other studies, the first conducted in Botswana (Chapman & Snyder, 1992) and the second in China (Chapman, Chen & Postiglione, 2000), which showed how teachers were often motivated to choose strategies which would improve their 'work life' rather than enhance the achievement levels of their students. Thus, while pre-service training provided teachers with technical skills, these were sometimes used to *" ... serve their own work life needs rather than to maximize the use of effective pedagogical strategy that might better enhance students' learning"* (*ibid.,* p. 303).

(ii) Social relationships and structural arrangements as shaping factors

McLaughlin (1993), also looking at the workplace context, presents a convincing case that it is the social relationships embedded in the school which have the most influence on the practice of beginning teachers. She states:

> *The school workplace is a physical setting, a formal organization, an employer. It is also a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy, and of professional community. This aspect of the workplace - the nature of professional community that exists there - appears more critical than any other factor to the character of teaching and learning for teachers and their students.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 99)

However, the study of six beginning teachers conducted by Bullough *et al*., (1992) presents evidence to show that the organisational arrangements within a school, such as the timetable, spatial arrangements, and supervisory patterns, also play major roles in either fostering beginning teacher development or in stifling initiative. These organisational structures can influence the type of contact between teachers by making it purposeful and planned (Little, 1990).

(iii) Possible responses by beginning teachers to workplace problems

Studies examining 'constraints and opportunities' in the workplace provide insight into the agency of beginning teachers. Work by Lacey (1977), Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985), Schempp, Sparkes and Templin (1993), and Bullough *et al.,* (1992) are of this kind and highlight strategies which beginning teachers adopt in an attempt to fit into the school culture. Lacey (1977) for example, describes the beginning teacher as having three possible 'social strategies' or responses to workplace problems: strategic compliance, internalised adjustment, or strategic redefinition of the situation, while Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) identify four typical responses: compliance, adjustment, successful redefinition and unsuccessful redefinition. In all these studies the trend is clear – beginning teachers do have options and there is no universal response to the powerful socialising forces of the school culture.

(iv) Beginning teacher resilience

Some studies have examined what has been labelled 'teacher resilience', that is, the extent to which teachers are able to confront and successfully overcome the challenges in the workplace. According to Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985), resilience develops when there is a contradiction between the official culture of the school and the actual practice in the school, as this allows individuals space to pursue their preferred ways of teaching. Grudnoff and Tuck (2005) while recognising the professional culture of the school, which can support or 'wear down' resilience, also raise the issue of the interplay between contextual and personal resources. To make this point they refer to two studies: first, one on 'resilience' by Werner (1995) which highlights the personal, familial and environment resources which contribute to an individual's propensity for resilience; second, a study by Sumsion (2001) focused on personal qualities, which combined with contextual factors, promotes resilience. These personal qualities include self-insight, leadership skills, risk-taking, perseverance, the adoption of a broad workplace perspective, and a strong sense of self-preservation.

A study by Gu and Day (2007), although recognising the role of personal qualities in contributing to 'resilience', puts forward the case for the over-riding influence of contextual factors. They argue that where the school culture is homogenous, with little dissonance between what is expected by the principal and what is undertaken by the staff, beginning teachers are seen as less resilient and more likely to conform to the pervasive ethos. Through a detailed analysis of their four-year, large scale, mixed-method research project, involving 300 teachers in 100 primary and secondary schools, they identified three factors which influence resilience: (i) personal factors - the beliefs and lives of teachers outside of school; (ii) situated factors - the conditions within school, including the quality of the leadership, the degree of staff collegiality, the nature of teacher-pupil relationships, and the behaviour of pupils; and, (iii) professional factors - the values, beliefs and skills of the teachers, and the way these interact with external policy agendas. Elmore (2002) and Bredeson (2003) have also highlighted how, within a collaborative school culture, strong leadership and collegial support play crucial roles in developing 'teacher resilience' and in strengthening the motivation to teach, especially by beginning teachers.

(v) <u>*Strategic compliance as a survival strategy*</u>

A more negative portrayal of the factors that can lead to a collapse of 'teacher resilience' is given by Schempp, Sparkes and Templin (1993) in their study in the USA of the professional experiences of three beginning physical education teachers. They show how the teachers spent their first year in the classroom learning to *"... adopt and devise strategies for gaining the influence necessary to insure his or her survival in the school"* (*ibid*., p. 462). They also describe how: *"to show their willingness to fit in and accept the status quo, the beginning teachers formed a society of the silent"* (*ibid*., p. 468). As in Lacey's study, teachers were surviving through compliance. The authors conclude that each of the schools in the study placed greater value on the beginning teachers' abilities to manage discipline, complete administration requirements, and develop harmonious relationships with colleagues, than on allowing them to demonstrate the professional knowledge they had acquired through their initial preparation courses (*ibid.,* p. 460). Similarly, Flores (2001) in her study of fourteen beginning teachers at six different schools in Portugal, found that while personal biography, beliefs, and expectations influenced the way teachers interpreted their experiences, most of the teachers in her study also adopted Lacey's *"strategic compliance"* to cope with the demands of the workplace. Flores concluded: *"... not*

only are [the workplace conditions] crucial in shaping new teachers' professional behaviour, but they lead to the re-analysis of new teachers' thinking and practices" (*ibid*., p. 140).

Section 2.3.3 has highlighted studies focused on the socialising effects of the workplace on beginning teachers' practices. The ethnographic case study methodologies used in a number of the studies reviewed above, provide a mosaic of the types of constraints which exist in the workplace. Although such small-scale studies have been criticised as context specific (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004) they do provide insights into the kinds of strategies which teachers employ to survive and manage the many tasks which they are presented with in their first year of teaching. Teachers do not work in isolation, but rather, their practices are shaped by both their personal histories as well as by the social and cultural contexts of their work. The literature on how teachers learn in the workplace is now examined.

2.3.4 Beginning Teachers: Learning in the workplace

In this section the learning processes of beginning teachers are examined, from a socio-cultural perspective that takes into account the central role of context. The literature provides an explanation of how beginning teachers learn and develop their teaching practices through a variety of communicative forms with colleagues. Concepts developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998) and Rogoff (1995) are examined and then a few of the many studies which have drawn upon this framework to organise formal learning in the workplace are reviewed. The section concludes with comment on the limitations of the approach.

(i) A socio-cultural theory of learning

Lave and Wenger (1991), in their socio-cultural theory of learning, conceptualise learning as a social and collective activity rather than as a change in an individual's psychological state. Central to the theory is the position that knowledge is created through practice and through engagement in activity located within social and cultural contexts (Lave, 1996; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Concepts within the theory, or developed in response to the theory, which have been influential in the structuring of studies on learning in the workplace, include 'situated learning' and 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991); 'guided participation' and 'participatory appropriation' (Rogoff, 1995; 1998; 2003); 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998); and, 'expansive learning' (Engeström, 1994; Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

(ii) Legitimate peripheral participation in the workplace

Drawing on studies of apprenticeship learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) identified the historical and socially 'situated learning' opportunities which exist in workplace environments. The concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' was used to explain how people who come to work in an established community participate and learn within an 'activity system'. Workplace learning, they argue, occurs through participation in the situated activities established by the existing social actors and occurs when newcomers make incremental changes to their practices over time (*ibid*., p. 98). Within this process established members of the community are 'full participants' while the newcomers are *"legitimate peripheral participants"* (*ibid*., pp. 36-37). However, becoming a full member of the community requires more than just being with existing members of the community - it also requires access to the activities of the community, to *"information, resources and opportunities for participation"* (*ibid*., p. 101).

Participation and learning then led to knowledge. Here Lave and Wenger (1991) advance the proposition that knowledge within a community is encoded in the way tools and artefacts - physical, linguistic and symbolic - are perceived and used. Brown *et al.,* (1989) explain that *"Tools share several significant features with knowledge ... using them entails both changing the user's view of the world and adopting the belief system of the culture in which they are used"* (p.33). Through legitimate peripheral participation the newcomers learn the socio-cultural practices of the community as they are given responsibilities and take on identities which are formed by and influence the ongoing nature of social relations within the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within the situated joint engagement of practice, the identity of individuals and the community is formed. In the complex array of social arrangements, power relations are ever present as newcomers and established members work side-by-side:

> *Shared participation is the stage on which the old and the new, the known and the unknown, the established and the hopeful, act out their differences and discover their commonalities, manifest their fear of one another, and come to terms with their need for one another. Each threatens the fulfilment of the other's destiny, just as it is essential to it.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 116)

(iii) The appropriation of workplace practices and tools

Rogoff's (1995) concept of 'guided participation' refers to the shared and personal experiences of individuals as they move towards acceptance by 'insiders' as full participating members of the community. The process involves moving from 'novice' to 'competent practitioner', that is, from 'outsider' to 'insider'. The concept incorporates the variety of possibilities that exist within a community that are available to newcomers and embraces the notion that guidance can be provided by cultural and social values as well as by individuals. 'Participatory appropriation', another of Rogoff's terms, is of a more individual nature as the newcomers, taking on the practices and tools of the established community, learn to *"... change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation"* (*ibid*., p. 143).

Learning through social engagement is summarised by Rogoff (2003): *"Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change*" (p. 368). She defines this form of learning as "*transformative*" (Rogoff, 1998, p. 695) and that learning occurs in the communications and interactions of social practice. This implies effort by each social actor to understand the other, and consequently gives rise to the development of new practices of participation. In her words, *"As the participants adjust to understand and communicate, their new perspectives involve greater understanding and are the basis for further growth*" (*ibid*., p. 682). In contrast, 'reproductive' forms of learning simply reproduce what is already present and occur in the absence of reflexivity. In the words of Mezirow, (1997) these forms occur when individuals *"uncritically act on the received ideas and judgments of others"* (p. 8).

(iv) The workplace as a community of practice

The notion of a *"community of practice"* was first described, somewhat convolutedly, by Lave and Wenger (1991) as *"a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice"* (p. 98). Wenger (1998), who brought the term into everyday use within learning research (Tynjälä, 2008), subsequently clarified the concept to refer to people coming together as a group through the common bond of a shared profession or occupation. Such groups can be formally established with the specific purpose in mind of sharing and gaining knowledge about an area of mutual interest. However, groups commonly arise spontaneously within the workplace, as the members

share their knowledge, skills and experience, usually informally, and in so doing learn from one another and develop their professional expertise.

For Wenger (1998), a central component of learning is 'community', structured by three interlocking dimensions. First, 'mutual engagement' as the collaborative relationships that hold the community together through participation; second, 'joint enterprise' as the way the members of the community, again through participation, negotiate an understanding of what it is that holds them together; and, third, a 'shared repertoire' of resources held in common, which can be used to further the objectives of their joint enterprise. Thus learning is a process of acquiring knowledge through social participation within the practices shared by the community. Moreover the practice *"... resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement*" (*ibid*., p. 73). Wenger, also stresses that individuals are not passive in participation processes and asserts that: *"... participation in social communities shapes our experience and it also shapes those communities"* (*ibid*., p. 56). It is therefore through participation that identity develops. Moreover, identity can be transformed through learning which is *"... not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person"* (*ibid*., p. 215).

In a discussion of workplace learning Wenger (1998) notes how individuals can be members of more than one community of practice. This gives rise to the idea that boundaries exist between communities and Wenger explains how boundaries are formed through shared practice, mutual engagement, shared repertoires of resources and the pursuit of a joint enterprise. Boundaries, which *"are not only for outsiders; (they) also keeps insiders in"* (*ibid*., p. 113) are marked out by the tools, objects and artefacts particular to the community's trade, profession or occupation. Such 'boundary objects' can connect participants to other communities. Wenger explains that there are multiple perspectives on and interpretations of these boundary objects, but that it is *"in the meeting of these perspectives that artifacts obtain their meanings"* (*ibid*, p. 108).

Another idea central to Wenger's theory is that individuals can engage in 'encounters' at the boundaries between communities. Encounters include such events as meetings, conversations and visits. When this happens some individuals may take on the role of 'broker' and negotiate meaning across the boundary for other members of the groups and may *"introduce elements of one practice into another*" (*ibid*., p. 105). Wenger (1998) notes that this is a complex process which involves *"...translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives"* (*ibid*., p. 109).

Brokers therefore, have the potential to influence the way in which new practices are introduced and adopted by other groups.

In an examination of what is actually learnt by participants within a community, Lave and Wenger (1991) note that "*a learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice*" (p. 93). In other words, within the community it is the practices themselves which constitute the 'curriculum' for learning for the newcomers, rather than formal guidelines. They describe how in apprenticeships, where master and novice relationships are often loosely structured, workplace conditions may lead novices to *"...configure their own learning relations with other apprentices"* (*ibid*., p. 93). Drawing on anecdotal evidence they conclude that in such conditions *"... where the circulation of knowledge among peers and near peers is possible, it spreads exceedingly rapidly and effectively*" (*ibid*., p. 93). One implication is that there may be sub-groups within the community of practice that are best able to help each other develop professionally.

In summary, Wenger's (1998) discussion regarding the benefits of mutual engagement in a shared practice helps us to understand the experience of beginning teachers and the influences upon them as they learn to teach. By focusing on the process of joint and shared participation, Wenger's framework has stimulated others (Borko, 2004; Cobb, McClain, de Silva Lamberg & Dean, 2003) to design learning opportunities for both beginning teachers as well as for their more experienced colleagues.

(v) <u>*Opportunities for beginning teachers to learn in the workplace*</u>

Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998), provide insights into how beginning teachers learn on the job. Their ideas have produced an increased understanding of the powerful influence which interpersonal relationships, set within the artefacts of the workplace (tools, equipment, documentation, workspaces etc), have on everyday workplace learning.

Building upon this knowledge, several studies in developed countries have shown how Wenger's 'community of practice' framework can be used to guide professional learning activities in schools. For example Cobb *et al.,* (2003) examined how a professional development program within a school can be structured to align different communities of practice to work together more effectively. The two-year study of six teachers documented how, through a range

of professional development activities, they created their own learning communities and communal learning enterprises.

The establishment of linkages between members of different communities may be a valuable way of addressing the more intractable problems facing newcomers. This point is highlighted in a study by Engeström and Sannino (2010), who argue from the concept of 'expansive learning' that different communities of practice are likely to incorporate different levels and types of expertise. However, their description of organisational structures also serves to remind us of the complexity of the learning process:

> *Learning in organizational networks is commonly depicted as horizontal movement of information between organizational units. This view easily forgets that networks are also hierarchies. In other words, learning is also vertical movement and boundary crossing between different organizational levels.*
>
> (*ibid.,* p. 13)

In a recent study Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) use a community of practice framework to examine the effectiveness of a support program for beginning teachers. Through the program a group of novice teachers from different schools met in a regularly organised forum and their discussions analysed for ideas about 'practice', 'meaning' and 'identity'. Although the community of practice of the beginning teachers was artificially formed by the study the authors argue that as its membership was made up solely of beginning teachers from different schools, the community provided qualitatively different support to the participants by comparison with that provided by experienced mentors or by more traditional induction programs. Although they do not recommend the abandonment of mentoring programs their research shows the value of supplementary support which beginning teachers from other communities of practice can provide.. The study concludes that community networks should not be idealised as the only approach to workplace learning and that rather than replacing mentoring support, such networks should be seen as complementary. Cuddapah and Clayton's findings also support Engeström and Sannino's contention that networks both within and across communities can be advantageous to all participants.

While recognizing the importance of social interaction for learning, Engeström (1994) also stresses the importance of structured teaching and learning in the workplace. Fuller and Unwin (1998) argue that it was through Engeström's work that the roles for the teacher and the trainer in

workplace learning were *"reclaimed"*. Engeström (1994) contrasts his notion of *"expansive learning"* - the ability to critically analyse and transform one's own practices - with the surface level "*imitative*" and "*conditioned learning*" which often occurs in the workplace (pp. 15-17). While this superficial learning can profit from external facilitation, Engeström's expansive learning nearly always requires skilful guidance:

> *Most of everyday learning consists of conditioning, imitation, and trial and error. Investigative, deep-level learning is relatively rare without instruction or intentional self-instruction. For that very reason, instruction is necessary. Its task is to enhance the quality of learning, to make it purposeful and methodical.*
>
> (*ibid.,* p. 48)

As discussed by Engeström (1994), learning in the workplace is best facilitated by those who can support reflection. Putman and Borko (2000) commenting on teachers in schools, highlight that having support and encouragement to reflect on practice is particularly important in workplaces where the pedagogical practices do not correspond to those advocated in teacher-training institutions and which "*do not support experimentation, risk taking and reflection required to transform practice"* (p. 10). Borko (2004) further argues that it cannot be assumed that open discussion, which is deemed necessary to transform practice, will happen naturally between colleagues in the workplace. In her review of studies into effective professional development programs, not just for new teachers but for the whole school, she asserts that for learning to occur, there needs to be skilful facilitation so that trust can develop between participants. When this happens she claims that: "*professional learning communities can foster teacher learning and instructional improvement*" (*ibid*., p. 6). The points made above by Putman and Borko (2000), Borko (2004) and Engeström (1994), highlight the need for facilitators to support workplace learning.

(vi) <u>Limitations of a community of practice framework</u>

Several studies on situated teacher learning have pointed to limitations within Lave and Wenger's work. On the basis of their workplace studies Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin (2005) argue that tension in the workplace between old-timers and newcomers can be significant and that this is underplayed by Lave and Wenger. Fuller *et al*., (2005) also argue for giving increased recognition to the way the dispositions, beliefs and prior learning which individuals bring to the workplace, can influence their identity. In their view, Lave and Wenger's focus on the formation of individual identity through participation in the community, gives

insufficient recognition to the role played by influences that have occurred prior to entering the workplace. A further criticism comes from Billett (2001) who claims that Lave and Wenger underestimate the extent to which, in today's workplaces, at least in developed contexts, learning typically includes a formal pathway which complements the informal learning resulting from participation in workplace practices. The value of developing pathways for formal learning within the workplace, which complement the lived experiences of beginning teachers in their classrooms, is today recognised in the literature on teacher education. The issue is examined in Section 2.3.8.

A key concept in Lave and Wenger's work is 'learning as participation'; however, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) argue that focusing solely on a participatory approach to teacher learning may be just as problematic as not focusing on it at all. They advocate a *"... re-emphasis [on] individual learning, but without losing the social and cultural perspective"* (*ibid*., p. 114). Similarly Borko (2004) champions the use of a 'multifocal lens' to analyse professional development programs whereby "*a sociocultural conceptual framework [is used] to focus on the professional development community"* and *"a psychological conceptual framework [is used] to focus on the individual teacher"* (*ibid*., p. 8). This idea of a multifocal lens, builds on earlier work by Rogoff (1995) who advocated viewing learning on three planes: personal, interpersonal and community/institutional.

Even with the limitations to the community of practice framework discussed above, the work by Lave, Wenger and Rogoff, provides a set of useful conceptual tools for analysing workplace learning. This section of the chapter has highlighted that learning from a socio-cultural perspective is not simply a matter of acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes, but is more usefully viewed as a 'process' wherein the new teacher learns through participation about 'the practices' which belong to the group and which he or she is expected to adopt. In other words it is a process of 'enculturation' (Cobb, 1994; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). While the process has been described as 'transformative', allowing for the development of new understandings as the community expands and changes (Rogoff, 1995; Wenger, 1998), it can also be viewed as a 'reproductive' process whereby communities engage in self-reinforcing behaviours (Wenger, 1998; Seely-Brown & Duguid, 1998). Such negative outcomes of relations between newcomers and existing members of the learning community signal the importance of inter-community communication and have implications for the introduction of professional development programs.

These implications have been raised by Billet (2001), Engeström (1994, 2001) and Eraut (2004) and are addressed in Section 2.3.8. The focus of the next section is pre-service education and what constitutes an 'effective' program.

2.3.5 Beginning Teachers: Pre-service programs: Shifting models

Educational research conducted over the past thirty years has led to a much better understanding of the difficulties which beginning teachers experience when they begin their careers. Many of the studies examined in earlier sections of this review have been influential in this regard; so, for example, there is now a greater recognition of the factors that promote or detract from teacher 'resilience'. This work has generated significant conceptual shifts regarding pre-service teacher education and strengthened the quality of teacher graduates. Teaching, once viewed as 'a craft' and 'a labour', is now 'a profession' and 'an art' (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1984). In short, shifting conceptions of teaching have transformed the way teacher education programs are structured.

(i) The traditional model of teacher education

The traditional model of teacher education, commonly followed in developed countries in the 1980s and 1990s, has been described as 'technical rationality' (Schon, 1983), 'positivist' (Britzman, 1991), 'transmission' (Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998; Tatto, 1997), and 'mechanistic' (Day, 1999). More recently these terms have been subsumed under a general 'application of theory' label (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999), an approach to teacher education in which the role of the university or college is to provide the theory, methods, and skills of teaching, while the schools provide the setting for their elaboration and transference during the teaching practicum. However, this approach has also come under criticism. Korthagen and Kessels (1999) claim that through such programs trainee-teachers learn about methods and strategies for many types of situations but *"... do not learn how to discover, in the specific situations occurring in everyday teaching, which methods and strategies to use"* (p. 7). Another criticism (Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, & Wubbels, 2001) is that its 'independent subject' approach compartmentalises knowledge and this results in a lack of integration between theory and practice. Criticism has also been directed at the way the traditional teacher education paradigm not only ignores the trainee-teachers' personal experiences but also ignores the context of the workplaces where the graduates from the programs will teach (Hoban, 2004).

(ii) Modern perceptions of teacher education

In developed countries, the shift in depiction of teaching to 'profession' and 'art' signalled an acknowledgement of the complex and dynamic nature of teaching as a process that requires its practitioners to make sensitive judgements within a variety of contexts (Hoban, 2004). As this change in perception came to the fore, 'teacher training' programs became 'teacher education' programs and their design changed to incorporate a more holistic approach to teaching and learning (Day 1999; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald & Zeichner, 2005) with a greater focus on the integration of theory and practice (Korthagen *et al.,* 2001).

A further change was towards a constructivist model of teacher education in which teacher-educators guide students through practical, meaningful experiences and jointly 'construct' knowledge (Richardson, 1992). The teacher-educator's role is to help trainee-teachers create their own solutions and no longer to deliver someone else's knowledge to passive recipients. However, designing courses that integrate theory and practice and help students come to their own understandings in a relatively short period of time, still presents itself as a major challenge to many teacher-educators.

2.3.6 Beginning Teachers: Pre-service programs: What is effective?

The studies reviewed on the influence on the professional practices of beginning teachers provide a platform from which to consider various models of pre-service programs. This section deals with literature which identifies the characteristics and types of teacher education programs judged, in developed countries, to be 'effective'. The research discussed in Section 2.3.2 shows how historically, pre-service programs have had little impact on helping teachers survive over their first year(s) of teaching. Increasingly, however, studies in developed countries are attempting to provide guidance for the development of more effective pre-service programs. Several common elements from this literature are discussed below.

(i) Exploring and modifying trainee-teachers' beliefs through self-reflection

Another development in teacher education programs arising out of research studies, is the use of autobiography as a way of getting trainee-teachers to examine their beliefs about teaching. Early work by Avalos (1993), reviewing studies undertaken in both developed and developing contexts, and more recently in a narrower study by Akyeampong and Stephens (2002) on the

beliefs and backgrounds of trainee-teachers in Ghana, promoted the value of a 'reflective' approach as a central part of teacher education programs. Both studies argue that teacher-educators need to ask trainee-teachers to think about and examine their educational backgrounds and beliefs in the light of the reality of daily teaching. Furthermore, they argue that challenging the assumptions which beginning teachers bring with them to their studies can help bridge the gap between expectations and reality which is *"critical to beginning teachers' survival in the profession"* (*ibid.,* p. 273). Similarly, in a handbook on teaching in developing countries, Stuart, Akyeampong and Croft (2009) claim that self-recognition of educational beliefs and then an examination of their reliability, is a vital first step in the process of learning to teach. As Cochran-Smith (2003) explains, this sometimes involves the challenge of 'unlearning' what one has been taught. The challenge for teacher-educators is to change the frame of reference which student-teachers have developed as pupils and which they bring to the course so that they are not closed to other interpretations of familiar ideas or to new concepts introduced by the teacher-educators (Kennedy, 1999).

(ii) Modifying trainee-teachers' beliefs through demonstration and coaching

A second approach to changing beliefs has been advanced by Guskey (1989) in his theory addressing attitudinal and perceptual changes in teachers. He concluded that before changes in beliefs could occur, teachers needed to see that their teaching practices positively influenced their students' learning. Building on this idea, Joyce and Showers (1995) promoted an approach to teacher education involving demonstration and coaching wherein teachers are supported to implement strategies that improve student achievement. While this approach was initially promoted for in-service training it has also been used as a valuable technique in pre-service programs (Mtika & Gates, 2010). Guskey (1989), and Joyce and Showers (1995), assert that successful implementation and behavioural change precede changes in beliefs. Similarly Elmore (2002) argues that it is through observation of and dialogue about these new teaching practices that teachers acquire different values and beliefs about student learning.

Stuart, Akyeampong and Croft (2009), working in Africa, also argue that teachers need to see improved student learning and to understand the reasons why they should change their practices. When coaching and support are not available to help teachers see the benefits of change, there is a danger that new practices will be adopted at a surface level only. Similarly, Mtika and Gates (2010) in Malawi, showed that without a reshaping of beliefs, changes in

teaching approaches remained at a superficial level as teachers followed the mandated practices without commitment to them. This finding is corroborated by Dahlström (2007) who, working in Namibia, Ethiopia and Laos, observed that teachers who had not witnessed any benefits from their attempts to use learner-centred methods absorbed only the surface features of the approach.

(iii) Teaching self-reflection

A key technique in teacher education is the use of 'reflective practice', an approach inspired by Dewey (1929) and developed by Schon (1983). Schon's focus on the *"reflective practitioner"* encouraged teachers to come to new understandings, which would enable them to *"... invent new methods"* (*ibid*., p. 66). He argued that through reflection, teachers could generate their own professional knowledge in the context of practice. Learning occurred from reflecting on both successful and less successful lessons.

Several studies conducted in developed countries have shown that positive benefits accrue for teachers who have been able to develop the skills of inquiry and critical reflection. For example, Shoffner (2011) found that when reflection was taught to and understood by trainee-teachers in the USA, this helped them cope with issues arising during practicum as well as in their first year of teaching. The value of teaching reflective practices and skills for teacher inquiry in pre-service teacher education is that it helps trainee-teachers to *"... develop the disposition to seek answers to difficult problems of teaching and learning, and the skills to learn from practice"* (Darling-Hammond, 2006, pp. 304-305). Kennedy (1991a), had earlier argued that the pre-service courses which do make a difference are those which require student-teachers to "*reason about the subject, to argue about alternative explanations, and to test hypotheses*" (*ibid*., p. 15). In all of these studies the role of college and school staff is seen as critical to helping trainee-teachers learn how to engage in open and honest reflection and debate.

Such explicit teaching is considered particularly important when trainee-teachers have graduated from traditional schooling programs which have not required them to question 'knowledge' and when there have been limited opportunities for them to offer opinions. It is worth noting that some studies also argue that preparing trainee-teachers to engage in critical reflection empowers them for life-long learning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982; Stanulis, 1994; Korthagen *et al*., 2001; Ponte, *et.al*., 2004; Darling-Hammond 2006).

However, several studies that touch on reflective practice in education in countries with non-western cultures, suggest that cultural dispositions need to be taken into account. For example in a paper concerning foreign teachers in Thailand, Holmes *et al*., (1996) discuss the Thai cultural characteristic of 'conflict avoidance' which, the paper suggests, has the potential to stop individuals from giving their true opinions in public if they perceive that to do so could lead to disharmony between members of the group. 'Conflict avoidance' is also discussed by Komin (1990) who argues that it is affected by the hierarchical nature of Thai society. The implications for teachers wanting to pursue reflective practice in such a culture is to recognise group dynamics and arrange learning so that individuals feel comfortable making reflective comments within socially safe settings (O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk, 1997).

(iv) Using action research in teacher education programs

Action research, now employed in many teacher education programs, is another significant approach that emerged from studies about how to prepare trainee-teachers for the complexities of the workplace (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981; 1982). The approach depicts reflection as a transformative process which encourages teachers to learn how to ask themselves the questions necessary for exploring their own practices (Stanulis, 1994). Research by Ponte, Beijard and Ax, (2004) conducted in Australia, the UK and the USA, argues for 'embedding' action research into the "*... objectives, course content, procedures and organization*" (p. 618), of pre-service programs in order to develop a disposition in teachers for self-inquiry into their teaching practices and as a method for life-long learning. One acclaimed approach to teacher education that follows this advice is the ALACT[80] model in which action research is embedded into the pre-service program aiming to teach trainee-teachers to reflect and question their professional practices (Korthagen *et al*., 2001). In a review of the model, Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006) note its success at producing teacher education graduates with a *"... strong focus on systematic reflection"* (*ibid*., p. 1024). Ponte *et al.,* (2004) suggest that the success of programs incorporating action research are based on three elements: (i) provision of adequate time (as trainee-teachers only learn action research by doing it); (ii) specific skills such as reflection are taught first; and, (iii) trainee-teachers are supported by mentors.

[80] ALACT is an acronym for a five-step reflection process: **A**ction, **L**ooking back on the action, **A**wareness of essential aspects, **C**reating alternative methods of action, **T**rial. The ALACT Program was developed at Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

Criticism has been made, however, when reflective practice and action research focus solely on one's individual practices (Zeichner and Liston, 1996). They argue that *"... teachers should be encouraged to focus both internally on their own practices, and externally on the social conditions of their practice"* (p. 19). With similar intent, Blase (1988) and Kuzmic (1994), recommend that prior to starting work teachers should be taught critical reflective skills. Blase (1985) refers to these critical reflection skills as, *"organisational literacy"* (p. 254) which prepare trainee-teachers to deal with the politics of the workplace and the pressure to conform experienced by them as beginning teachers. These suggestions stem from ethnographic studies conducted in the USA by Blase and by Kuzmic wherein beginning teachers were observed shifting from the techniques they learnt in their pre-service course to the traditional teaching practices of their colleagues.

2.3.7 Beginning Teachers: Pre-service programs: The role of professional practice

Today, professional practice is central to most pre-service programs and is *"often considered the most influential component of professional socialization in teacher education"* (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008, p. 42). Rather than being a separate entity tagged on at the end, professional practice is now a prime element of the course (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Eraut, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Loughran 2006). This important component of pre-service programs is examined in what follows.

(i) <u>The importance of professional practice</u>

In an examination of effective teacher education programs, Kennedy (1991a) warned that structural adjustments alone would be insufficient to improve teacher education. Rather, what mattered was the building of relationships between components. More recently others have argued for *"program coherence"* (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1023) with course work and professional practice *"carefully sequenced and tightly interwoven"* (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 306). At the heart of these ideas is the way professional practice is organised, as highlighted by Darling-Hammond:

> *It is impossible to teach recruits how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest they 'do the opposite' of what they have observed in the classroom. No amount of coursework can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 308)

Effective professional practice depends on cooperation between college lecturers and classroom teachers so that trainee-teachers can see the relationship between content knowledge and pedagogy in real settings (Kennedy, 1991a). In doing so the gap between theory and practice is closed (Eraut, 2000). Similarly, Kagan (1992) argues for a professional practice that allows teachers to develop both problem-solving skills and their self-image as a teacher. She concluded that studies show that graduates too often begin teaching *"... obsessed with class control, designing instruction, not to promote pupil learning, but to discourage disruptive behaviour"* (*ibid*., p. 155). Professional practice therefore needs to help teachers develop *"... standard routines that integrate instruction and management ..." (ibid.),* so that beginning teachers can attend to student's learning needs.

(ii) <u>The role of the cooperating teacher</u>

To have positive professional practice experiences trainee-teachers need skilful cooperating classroom teachers working in collaborative school climates who are able to share and explain the procedural knowledge required to manage a class and become responsive to pupil needs. Moreover, for maximum benefit, the cooperating teachers not only need to be skillful practitioners, but they also need to be in tune with the methodologies promoted in the colleges. Eraut (2000) highlights the importance of placing teachers in schools where there are positive commitments to teaching and a collegial atmosphere. Extending this idea, Loughran (2006) argues for providing trainee-teachers with opportunities to: *"see and hear the pedagogical reasoning that underpins the teaching they are experiencing"* (*ibid*., pp. 5-6). Ponte *et al.,* (2004), with particular reference to the formulation of action research projects, highlight that any such collaboration should aim to develop a culture in which all partners jointly construct professional knowledge.

(iii) <u>Organising positive professional practice experiences</u>

However, there are also warnings that the professional practice experiences that trainee-teachers have can also be negative. Feiman-Nemser (1983) noted that, *"While [professional practice] may give future teachers a taste of reality, student teaching can also foster bad habits and narrow vision"* (p. 12). She later put forward the view that while it is advisable to have extended periods of time in the field it is not so much the duration of the experience that is important, but the kind of support and experience which is organised so that trainee-teachers have *"... desirable lessons"* (Feiman-Nemser, 2001 p. 1024). Kennedy (1991a) also raises concerns

about what can ensue when trainee-teachers observe and work with cooperating teachers whose practice is mediocre or when the college lecturers require little in the way of critical reflection. Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) argue that the quality of the professional practice depends on the relationships engendered between trainee-teachers, cooperating teachers, and college lecturers which ideally provide opportunities for exploring ideas and reflecting on practice in an environment that encourages experimentation and honest evaluation.

The support which college lectures can provide in this tripartite relationship, is discussed by Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg (2005). They claim that the role college lecturers should play is critical as "*the room for teacher reflection often diminishes under the ongoing daily pressures of practice"* (p.108). They argue that if critical reflection is put aside in response to the stress of day-to-day teaching, it is crucial that the college lecturer is available to step in and encourage the trainee-teacher to analyse what is happening.

(iv) Collaboration between stakeholders

A critical feature of effective pre-service teacher education programs is the degree of collaboration between stakeholders over the organisation of professional practice (Korthagen *et al.,* 2006). Accounts of teacher education colleges providing the theory and the schools providing the settings for practice, while the trainee-teachers are left to integrate these components, are common (Kennedy, 1991a; Wideen *et al.,* 1998). Although the principle of collaboration between stakeholders is commonly articulated (Hoban 2004), it cannot be achieved without investing time and funds. Korthagen *et al.,* (2006) describe how for its acclaimed program Utrecht University first invested a significant level of resources which ensured that more than 80 percent of the cooperating teachers in their program attended training courses to learn how to supervise trainee-teachers and how to create shared understandings.

Other studies have noted the difficulties that arise in developing countries when institutions attempt to develop such collaboration (Kunje, 2002; George, Worrell & Rampersad, 2002). In these contexts constraints to the development of equal, productive partnerships are often associated with a lack of funding, lack of time, large classes and lack of training for cooperating teachers. In the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research (MUSTER)[81] supported programs,

[81] The Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER), funded by DfID, is based on collaboration between educational research institutes in Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago and the University of Sussex Institute of Education.

implemented across five developing countries, none of the sites reported relationships between institutions that were continuously positive (Lewin & Stuart, 2003), rather they reported that: *"Relationships between schools and colleges varied from indifferent to mistrustful or even hostile"* (*ibid*., p. 174). Even in the few cases where there appeared to be an attempt at collaboration between a college and the practicum schools, they were hampered by a lack of resources, in particular by a lack of financial support for transport to schools in the rural areas where practicums were being conducted.

In countries where stakeholder collaboration is limited and where quality experiences in professional practice for large numbers of trainee-teachers are difficult to organise, negative experiences may be the norm. Lewin and Stuart (2003) in their review of the MUSTER program, highlight the problems commonly experienced on practicum by trainee-teachers in such contexts. In the countries where the MUSTER research was conducted the practicum was rarely at the heart of the pre-service program. Furthermore, for many of the trainee-teachers, the experience was often limited to consenting to whatever the cooperating teacher asked and following instructions to undertake traditional ways of teaching, rather than experimenting with the methods taught through their college program. A review of teacher education in Uganda conducted by O'Sullivan (2010) highlighted the problem of supervision of practicum. Even when teacher-educators were able to provide supervision of the practicum their advice was limited due to their own lack of experience and understanding of how to implement active, participatory teaching strategies. This suggests a generalised need for the professional development of teacher-educators.

Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg (2005) writing about teacher education in developed countries note that there has been little attention given to the preparation or training of teacher-educators. In their study they focus on the importance of teacher-educators developing a strong grasp on ways to promote reflection among trainee-teachers and to themselves develop expertise that is "*applicable for teaching about teaching*" (p. 108). Cochran-Smith (2003) has also drawn attention to the poor preparation many teacher-educators have had for their work and highlights the need for them to systematically work together in 'inquiry communities'.

O'Sullivan (2010) writing about teacher education in Uganda, lists four ways in which the competencies of the teacher-educators she observed could be enhanced: (i) the teacher-educators needed greater pedagogical knowledge; (ii) there was a lack of understanding of the context in

which the teachers work, especially of those in rural areas; (iii) most of the teacher-educators needed to improve their practicum supervision skills; and, (iv) they all needed to improve their critical reflection skills which were a prerequisite for conducting research. O'Sullivan argues that enhanced competencies in these areas would greatly improve the ways in which teacher-educators could help guide their students.

2.3.8 Beginning Teachers: Support in the workplace: Induction programs

In most developed countries, when beginning teachers commence work, they are given professional support through induction programs. At the time of writing there are no such programs in Laos, although their introduction by 2015 for beginning primary school teachers is included within Lao Ministry of Education forward planning documents.[82] This section of the chapter reviews a number of studies of induction programs with the aim of examining how they might be designed for specific contexts.

(v) The entanglement of teaching and learning to teach

While much work has gone into improving the effectiveness of initial teacher preparation programs, increasing effort is now being directed towards supporting teachers in the workplace. No matter how effective pre-service programs are, their inevitable limitations provide an important justification for formal induction programs (Tickle, 2000). And it is here that the intertwined double helix of teaching and learning to teach begins to impact on the professional lives of teachers (Wildman, Niles, Magliaro & McLaughlin, 1989). This is of critical importance, because as Feiman-Nemser (2001) has observed:

> *The first encounter with real teaching occurs when beginning teachers step into their own classroom. Then learning to teach begins in earnest. ... The situation in which new teachers find themselves is inherently paradoxical … they must demonstrate skills and abilities that they do not yet have and can only gain by beginning to do what they do not yet understand.*
>
> (*ibid*., pp. 1026-1027)

[82] See *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010*) (MoE, 2006a).

(vi) The need for formal support programs

As discussed above (2.3.1), many research studies have focused on the professional experiences of beginning teachers and have documented how common it is in both developed and developing contexts for the teachers to express feelings of frustration, isolation and concern for their classroom survival. The need for formal support programs for beginning teachers requires no further justification than that provided by the following interconnected pieces of evidence: (i) recognition of how influential the first year of teaching is on the rest of a teacher's career (Rust, 1994; Kuzmic, 1994, Gratch, 1998); (ii) evidence from developed countries that poor experiences in the early years can lead to high attrition rates of new teachers (Weiss, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011); and, (iii) evidence that support to beginning teachers helps improve student achievement and progress (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Craig, Kraft & du Plessis, 1998; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

(vii) The diversity of induction programs

Support programs for beginning teachers, commonly known as induction programs, have been defined by Beijaard, Buitink and Kessels (2010) as *"a more-or-less planned and formalized system to assist and support beginning teachers in becoming competent and effective professionals"* (p. 563). Others, such as Wong, Britton and Ganser (2005) portray a more cohesive and formalised approach to induction describing it as *"... a highly organised and comprehensive form of staff development, involving many people and components, that typically continues as a sustained process for the first two to five years of a teacher's career*" (*ibid*., p.379). However, in reality, there is great diversity in the forms of professional support in the workplace. The exact content, the configuration of the components, and the degree of formality is quite diverse and depends upon both the intent of the program as well as the availability of resources such as time, collegial knowledge, and the capacity of the school and the broader education system more generally.

(viii) Components of induction programs

An early review of programs for beginning teachers in the USA, records a mix of on-site and off-site support (Grant & Zeichner, 1981). The components include reduced workloads, release time from teaching to attend workshops, opportunities for discussion with other beginning teachers, opportunities to observe and to engage in discussion with more experienced teachers, and the provision of a mentor to work with beginning teachers. In a recent review of 15 induction

programs, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) recorded many similar activities with the most common being orientation sessions, faculty collaborative periods, meetings with supervisors, developmental workshops, extra classroom assistance, reduced workloads, and, especially, mentoring (*ibid*., p. 203). Over the last decade, with increasing advances in technology, a number of induction support programs in developed countries have introduced a whole new component - that of online support. A key benefit of the latter is that the "*use of online technologies to deliver collaborative support and professional development could help to remove the sense of professional isolation felt so acutely by many novice teachers*" (Herrington, Herrington, Kervin & Ferry, 2006, p. 129).

(ix) Customising induction programs

Many research studies have focused on gathering teachers' opinions about their preferred types of support. Grant and Zeichner (1981), in a study of 72 beginning teachers, found that the most preferred type of induction activity was 'in-classroom' support. The study showed that the concerns of teachers were diverse and they therefore advocated that support should be individualised and geared to the specific concerns of the teachers. These findings were endorsed by Gold (1996) who found that the most favoured kind of assistance was support from mentors who were able to provide practical feedback. Flores (2006), and Hammerness *et al.,* (2005), have also stressed the importance of responding to the individualised nature of teachers' needs and argue against a 'one-size-fits-all approach'.

(x) Reconceptualising induction programs

The individual support activities for beginning teachers listed above, appear to have changed little over the last thirty years. However, there have been some significant shifts in the way induction programs are now conceptually framed. One such shift is the recognition that the concept of induction is embedded within the culture of the education system. Britton, Pain, Pimm and Raizen (2003) draw from a set of case studies conducted in five countries (France, Switzerland, New Zealand, Japan and China) to argue that:

> *Culture powerfully shapes not only what induction is but, more fundamentally, both why it is seen as important and what newcomers are being introduced to. It helps both define the 'problem' of induction and significantly serves to determine how that problem is approached.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 313)

There is now broad agreement of the need for more cohesive and structured induction programs, which as well as providing support, focus on teacher learning. For example, in 2005 a report issued by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated that: *"Well-structured and resourced induction programmes for new teachers are vitally important in ensuring a good start to the career"* (OECD, 2005, p. 95). In line with these developments Britton, *et al*., (2003) suggest that where induction goals are well established they generally point to helping beginning teachers develop knowledge and skills in:

> *... effective subject matter teaching, understanding and meeting pupils' needs, assessing pupil work and learning, reflective and inquiry-oriented practice, dealing with parents, understanding school organization and participating in the school community, [and] understanding self and current status in one's career.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 319)

(xi) <u>*Induction: a whole-school approach*</u>

Wildman, Magliaro, Niles and Niles (1992) put forward the case that induction programs work best when they are set within supportive and collaborative school cultures. Feiman-Nemser (2001), calling for a new paradigm of professional development in the school, argued that through *"... critical and thoughtful conversations, teachers develop and refine ways to study teaching and learning"* (*ibid*., p. 1042). Since that time, activities designed to foster collaborative learning with other colleagues and with mentors have been influenced by the work on 'situated learning', 'legitimate peripheral participation' and 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Developments, more generally, in the area of workplace learning (Engeström, 1994, 2001) have also influenced ideas about teacher learning (Fuller & Unwin, 1998, 2002; Billett, 2001; Eraut, 2004; Eraut, Steadman, Furner, Maillardet, Miller, Ali & Blackman, 2004).

From research conducted with nurses, engineers and accountants, Eraut (2004) identifies four types of activities which facilitate learning in the workplace: (i) participation in group activities; (ii) working alongside others; (iii) tackling challenging tasks; and, (iv) working with clients. Eraut *et al*., (2004) argue that two conditions that help people learn are the provision of feedback and support from "*helpful others*" (*ibid*., p. 5). This position is supported by Billett (2001) who states that for those entering the workforce, it is *"... the support and guidance they are able to access, [which] will influence the nature of that learning"* (p. 31).

With regard to the specific context of teacher learning in schools, Beijaard *et al.,* (2010) signal how the school culture can have a significant and mediating effect on an induction program, and argue that this is more meaningful when the program is "*embedded in the school context and is part of a more general policy regarding the professional development of teachers*" (p. 564). This line of argument is supported by Weiss (1999) who examined the professional development of 2,676 teachers across a six-year period in the USA. She concluded that in schools where the culture supported collaboration and teacher participation in decision making, there was a strong positive correlation with higher morale, deeper commitment to teaching, and intention to remain in the profession. Similarly, in a review into a professional development program in Indonesia, Thair and Treagust (2003), concluded that its strengths lay in promoting activities which included *"collegiality and collaboration"* along with *"extended time for the assimilation of new knowledge, and sustained support and feedback"* (p. 212). Also, a review of induction programs in China by Wong *et al*., (2005), shows how programs can be particularly effective when they are part of a whole school professional development approach. In their study it was common for beginning teachers to participate in professional development activities alongside experienced staff, for example, attending lesson preparation groups and teacher research groups. Such activities were considered highly influential on beginning teachers as they participated with their colleagues to research their own teaching practices.

(xii) <u>A role for teacher education institutes in induction programs</u>

A second feature of this new paradigm is the role which teacher training institutes can play in induction in both developing and developed countries. Beijaard *et al.,* (2010) advocate closer collaboration between schools and teacher education colleges and universities so that teacher-educators cannot only support beginning teachers but also help the whole school staff. They describe how through this co-operation teacher-educators working in pre-service programs can develop *"new insights into what can be learned at the workplace and what cannot"* (pp. 566-567). The implication is that these new understandings can influence what is taught in pre-service programs. The support from teacher-educators can also provide direct benefit to the school and is particularly vital when the school capacity is weak and when approaches used in schools are in opposition to those promoted in initial teacher education programs. As Bredeson (2003) shows, not all informal teacher-learning in schools is good, as beginning teachers can be exposed to poor teaching practices and in extreme cases, to what he describes as 'toxic' influences. Thus teacher-

educators have a role to play in assisting not just beginning teachers to consider their own practices, but also longer-standing members of staff.

Britton *et al*., (2003) argue, however, that the partnership between stakeholders is fraught with tension and requires careful management. They assert that managing this tension requires both time and commitment across all levels of the education system - the schools, districts and provinces. In their words they liken the process to a *"dance"* which *"... relies on a balance among participants, who need to recognise the limits of their own contribution and the benefits of the contribution of others"* (p. 326).

(xiii) The agency of the beginning teacher

A final feature of this new perspective on teacher induction programs is related to the agency of the beginning teacher. In some developed countries such as Switzerland, New Zealand, Australia and Japan induction programs have shifted from a 'deficit model' of beginning teachers, which assumes that they are struggling and lacking competence, to a model which views beginning teachers as competent but with an ongoing right to professional development, a right which continues throughout their teaching career (Wong *et al*., 2005). This view is shared by Tickle (2000) who warns against viewing new teachers in terms of deficits arguing that this may lead to *"missed opportunities to capitalize on the creative potential and professional commitments of graduate entrants to the education service"* (p. 2). Others such as Ruohotie-Lyhty and Kaikkonen (2009) also promote this view, although they recognise that the reality for the beginning teacher to be a change agent is still problematic and requires the right set of conditions and leadership at the school level.

2.3.9 Beginning Teachers: Support in the workplace: Mentoring

A significant development in formalised induction programs has been the increasing use of mentoring as a component, to the extent that the terms 'induction' and 'mentoring' are often used interchangeably (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). While mentoring is loosely taken as 'support', Achinstein and Villar (2004) describe it as a process in which experienced teachers *"... attend to the professional development of beginning teachers through on-going observation, conversations, and assessment of practice, goal-setting aligned with standards of quality teaching, subject matter knowledge, advocacy, and technical and emotional support"* (p. 311).

(i) Types of mentoring

Particular attention has been paid to identifying the types of assistance which mentors provide to beginning teachers. Wildman *et al*., (1989), in a study of the collegial relationships between fifteen pairs of beginning teachers and their mentors, identified ways mentors could assist beginning teachers through the provision of emotional support, by offering pedagogical guidance, and by giving practical advice. In a later, more extensive study of 150 'mentor-beginner dyads', Wildman *et al*., (1992) found that the mentors provided a diverse range of support including encouraging reflection, directing and supporting action, directly assisting beginners, providing information to address short-term problems, providing resources or ideas to solve immediate problems, and providing a combination of professional and emotional support designed to motivate beginners. In addition, the study found that mentors also often acted as 'mediators' or 'brokers' by referring the beginning teacher to other colleagues for assistance. However, of all the many types of support being offered by mentors, Odell and Ferraro (1992) in a survey of 141 beginning teachers found that the type ranked by recipients as most beneficial was *"emotional support"* (p. 202).

(ii) Characteristics of effective mentors and mentor programs

Research into improving mentoring programs has focused on desirable mentor characteristics such as those suggested by Tickle (1994): being accessible and reliable; having professional credibility and the respect of colleagues; being experienced; being approachable, calm, honest, and humble; being a good listener; being sensitive and empathetic; handling matters with humour; and having a supportive, constructive and encouraging personality. Similar attributes, highlighting an emotional support role for mentors, have been identified by Gold (1996), and Odell and Huling (2000). For Wildman *et al*., (1992) the characteristics of effective mentors: are guiding reflection; modelling good practices; and, working collaboratively to problem solve. For Stanulis (1994), the best mentors were professional colleagues who consistently asked the beginning teachers to reflect on and discuss their teaching, encouraging them to *"... talk about why one makes a teaching decision and why that teaching decision is appropriate for particular children"* (*ibid*., p. 36). Gratch (1998) similarly argued that the best mentors were not those who just solved the problems of the beginning teachers, but rather those who had the skills and experience to facilitate self-inquiry and reflection. Reviews of mentor programs have revealed that the programs judged by both beginning teachers and mentors as

being successful were those which involved some training for the mentors in their responsibilities and which allowed them adequate release time to undertake their mentoring role (Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Wong, Britton & Ganser, 2005; Schwille & Dembele, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

(iii) Mentor training

Evidence from studies mentioned above reveals that mentors need to be competent in a range of skills if beginning teachers are to benefit from working with them. As Kennedy (1991a) explains: "*While mentors may help beginners with the emotional adjustments to teaching, the availability of mentors by itself does not guarantee that teachers will learn more effective teaching strategies"* (p. 15). Stanulis (1994) takes up this point claiming that while experienced teachers may have the wisdom of practice to help new teachers, they do not necessarily know how to make explicit, their implicit and tacit knowledge. Similarly Carter (1990) who concludes: *"Simply telling novices what experts know will not produce expertise"* (p. 299).

Stemming from conclusions that mentoring involves more than providing emotional support, and that mentors need to learn how to support reflective inquiry in beginning teachers, strong arguments have been advanced for mentor training programs. Huling-Austin (1992) proposed that such programs should include training on: the purposes of induction; the philosophy of the school district; needs and priorities; district policies and operating procedures; working with adult learners; stages of teacher development; concerns and needs of beginning teachers; clinical supervision; classroom observation and conferencing skills; teacher reflection; and, fostering self-esteem and self-reliance. Even though the research studies highlight the importance of appropriate mentor characteristics (Schwille & Dembele, 2007), there is evidence to suggest that even in developed countries where induction programs are common, formal training for mentors is still not commonly provided (OECD, 2005).

The provision of training is especially relevant if older teachers who have not been exposed to or are not experienced in 'reflective practices' through their own pre-service course or through other professional development programs, are assigned to work with beginning teachers. The problem, as Schwille and Dembele (2007) note is that *"mentors must manage a continuing tension between giving the novice the assistance needed to resolve immediate problems of teaching, and at the same time helping the novice take a longer and deeper view of teaching"* (p.

95), and without appropriate training, even experienced teachers may struggle to undertake both tasks successfully.

Typically studies into mentoring have focused on the mentor and beginning teacher relationship; however, a unique study conducted in the USA by Hayes (2006) looked at the experience of a triad made up of a mentor, a beginning teacher and a second-year-out teacher. Hayes concluded that when other early career teachers are brought into the induction program to support first-year-out teachers, all members of the triad group benefit. In particular: *"the impact on the second year teacher is significant. As the second year teacher begins taking responsibility for the transition process of the first year novice teacher, the professional growth of the second year teacher is enhanced"* (pp. 239-240). This study, although small, is significant in that it shows how other teachers with only slightly more experience can also benefit from being included in the process of providing support to others.

2.3.10 Beginning Teachers: The situation in developing countries

In the preceding sections (2.3.1 to 2.3.9) reference has been made to studies conducted in both developing and developed countries. This section focuses solely on the literature from developing countries and highlights issues related to pre-service programs and workplace support which are especially relevant to Laos.

(i) Pre-service teacher education

In developing countries there have been limited shifts away from traditional approaches to teacher education (UNESCO, 2004; 2010). Lewin and Stuart (2003), in their review of teacher education programs supported by the MUSTER Project, conclude that part of the problem of teacher education in many developing countries lies in a *"conceptual weakness ... where theory and practice are taught - and learnt -separately"* and where it is "*generally assum(ed) that trainees will go into the schools and 'apply the theory' learnt in college. In reality, this does not happen"* (*ibid.,* p. 173). Other studies (Lewin, Samuel & Sayed, 2003; Vavrus, 2009; Mtika & Gates, 2010; Wolfenden, Umar, Aguti, & Gafar, 2010) report similar findings - that the approach to pre-service teacher education courses in many developing countries continues to be based on a 'transmission model' (Tatto, 1997; Wideen *et al*., 1998) in which teacher-educators (the 'lecturers') lecture their passive students, seemingly without irony, about the merits of a learner-centred approach to teaching, while often themselves teaching to a set textbook-based curriculum

driven by an examination system, and that offers few opportunities for practice, creativity, or even thought. The urgency for reform of teacher education programs is noted by Wolfenden *et al*., (2010) who in their review of teacher education materials in countries in sub-Saharan Africa[83] comment: *"without shifts at scale new teachers emerging from colleges will become quickly socialised in the predominant teacher-centered pedagogic practices of the schools in which they work"* (p. 2).

Calls to reform teacher education programs in developing countries and to improve the quality of teacher-educators have become increasingly common (Tatto, 1997; Arthur 1998; Lewin & Stuart, 2003; Heneveld, Ndidde, Rajonhson & Swai, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2010; Mtika & Gates, 2010). Arthur (1998), in her study in Botswana, criticises the teacher training colleges for not challenging the traditional teacher-centred classroom practices. O'Sullivan (2010), in her review of Ugandan teacher education programs found that although teacher-educators were required to complete a two-year preparation program prior to commencing work in teacher colleges, the quality of their teaching was nonetheless lacking. Heneveld *et al*., (2006) in a study of teacher training carried out in Uganda, Madagascar, Mozambique and Tanzania, found that in three out of the four countries the data *"did not suggest any significant differences in teaching performance between teachers who had been trained and those with less education and no or little teacher training"* (p. 9). And Mtika and Gates (2010) in Malawi, reported significant problems in the way teacher-educators taught their trainee-teachers. They emphasised the need for college staff to engage in *"co-generative dialogue"* (p. 403) with other stakeholders in order to improve the integration of pedagogical knowledge with practice.

While the four studies above, all set in Africa, were uniformly negative about the preparation of teacher-educators, Tatto's (1997) review of teacher education programs in Colombia and Mexico is more positive. In these programs there were attempts by the teacher-educators:

> *... to help teachers develop meaning out of what they learn, emphasize discipline-oriented teaching and learning, see learning as socially constructed and responsive to its socio-historical context, and use the curriculum .... in an open flexible fashion subject to negotiation among students and teachers*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 409)

[83] The countries involved in the review were Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. These countries are linked through a professional education network known as the Teacher Educators of Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA). See also <http://www.tessafrica.net/>

While Tatto concluded that these teacher education programs did effect change in teachers' practices, it took considerable time: "*15 years in the Colombian case, and at least 5 years in the Mexican case*" (*ibid*., p. 413). She also comments that 'effective' teacher education programs require the collaboration of a number of stakeholders: teacher-educators, teachers, parents and administrators. The same point was raised ten years later with respect to programs in Malawi by Mtika and Gates (2010).

McGinn and Schiefelbein (2010) claim that there have been few studies in developing countries that have identified particular teacher education programs which have been demonstrably effective in preparing trainee-teachers to move away from traditional 'teacher-centred' practices and consequently there is a need for such research. Of particular interest would be research into programs which are not based on a 'transmission' model of teacher education. In the absence of these studies the only research which is available was undertaken in developed contexts. These studies were reviewed in Section 2.3.6 and provide some guidance towards the design of effective pre-service programs.

In summary, suggestions as to how to improve pre-service education programs in developing contexts include: (i) interlinking theory and practice in all methodology courses and the development of more collaborative working relations between schools and colleges (Lewin & Stuart 2003; O'Sullivan 2010); (ii) using case study analysis to prepare teachers for the realities of classroom teaching (Stuart *et al*., 2009); (iii) teaching the skills of action research in order to improve teachers' pedagogical practices and disposition towards inquiry (O'Sullivan, 2004); and, (iv) analysing socially and culturally accepted attitudes to teaching (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002). The task of appropriating good practices and adapting them to suit educational contexts in developing countries is discussed by Lewin and Stuart (2003). They argue that regardless of the resource levels with which teachers must work, the role of teacher-educators is to *"produce teachers able to deal with the challenge of the 21st century classrooms [and] to adapt the new approaches to local realities and cultures"* (p. 130).

(ii) <u>Workplace support for beginning teachers in developing contexts</u>

As outlined in 2.3.5, an increasing number of beginning teachers in developed countries now have access to some type of formal support program (OECD, 2005). However, the provision of support for beginning teachers in developing countries is far less common and the task of providing it is significantly more difficult. In general there is little evidence of the provision of

systematic programs of in-school support for beginning teachers in developing contexts aimed at assisting them to transit from trainee-teachers to trained professionals. Studies conducted in developing regions such as Botswana (Tafa, 2004), rural China (Chapman *et al*., 2000), Pakistan (Westbrook *et al*., 2009) and the five countries where the MUSTER project was implemented[84] (Lewin & Stuart, 2003) that address workplace support, have highlighted two common difficulties. First, most beginning teachers work in under-resourced and overcrowded classrooms. Second, the teaching practices in the schools differ from the practices advocated in the pre-service courses. This disjunction between advocated practice and the practice of experienced teachers, makes it unlikely that once they commence work, new teachers will receive any professional guidance on modern teaching methodologies or encouragement to pursue them.

In their review of the MUSTER programs, Stuart *et al*. (2009) found that induction remained largely informal, and primarily served to give teachers emotional support. In Ghana, Akyeampong and Lewin, (2002) have documented the way beginning teachers draw upon their own memories of schooling as a guide for practice, but readily accept, when offered, informal support from sympathetic colleagues. This supports Schwille and Dembele's (2007) contention that *"If there is no formal programme of induction, it is important to note that induction still occurs as an informal process of on-the-job learning from practice and from the cultures and norms of school settings"* (p. 33). These contemporary studies in developing countries are reminiscent of those conducted in developed countries in the 1980s and 1990s which highlighted the mismatch between the idealistic expectations of beginning teachers and the realities of their schools (Beijaard *et al*., 2010). As there are few examples in developing contexts of systematic programs of in-school support for beginning teachers, those interested in this area have mainly the studies from developed countries to fall back on. A number of these were reviewed earlier in Sections 2.3.8 and 2.3.9 and while not directly applicable to developing contexts, do suggest areas that could be considered for adaptation.

[84] The MUSTER project was implemented in Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago.

2.3.11 Research studies in Lao PDR on the professional experiences of teachers

At the time of writing, no studies have been published that have focused on the classroom experiences of beginning teachers in Lao primary schools and only a few that have documented the conditions in Lao schools and the professional experiences of the teachers more generally. This lack of educational research is discussed by Backtorp (2007) in her thesis on development cooperation, education and gender in Laos. She comments: *"Finding information about the situation of Lao teachers in general and Lao teachers in higher education specifically has proven difficult since there is little research done on the matter"* (*ibid*., p. 33). Adams, Hwa Kee and Lin (2001) offer historical explanations for this situation:

> *The short supply of research activities can be traced to the exodus of highly educated Laotians at the time of the revolution, the currently underdeveloped education system (which has virtually no output of education researchers), and the initial Lao government priorities that focused on nation building, national defence, and development of national language and symbols. Within the context of these priorities there has been little demand for or resources to build research capabilities or a tradition of research.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 230)

International donor agencies, aware of this situation, are increasingly supporting research studies with two purposes in mind: first, to collect reliable data to support their projects; second, to build the research capacity of government staff. Commencing in 2003, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) funded six 'operational' studies through the Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers (TTEST) Project. Five of the studies, all fairly limited in scope, examined the organisation of primary school clusters (TEADC, 2004b); the training of teachers and their recruitment into the profession (TEADC, 2004c); the capacity of the eight Teacher Education Institutes (TEADC, 2006a); the establishment of professional development networks (TEADC, 2006b); and, primary mathematics and Lao language assessment (TEADC, 2007). While various methodological limitations of the studies are acknowledged, for example: *"... for many of the Lao educators participating in the research, the fieldwork offered the first or one of the first experiences of social science interviewing"* (TEADC, 2004a, p. 8), there are still valuable insights to be gained from the studies.

The first of these operational studies (TEADC, 2004a) to be undertaken examined the teaching performance in Lao primary schools and is of particular relevance to this study. The research, undertaken by a Lao team of government employees, used scheduled site visits to observe 68 lessons (of which only 14 were observed in rural schools) and to conduct interviews with 68 school staff across 17 primary schools located in three provinces. These one-off observations and single stand-alone interviews sought to evaluate classroom teaching and to identify the major factors that influenced teacher performance. The study found that on the whole teaching was textbook orientated, teacher talk predominated in all classrooms and accounted for an average of 95% of the lesson time, and there was little evidence that teachers employed any of the modern teaching approaches which are talked about in policy statements (learner-centred methods, group work, the use of concrete materials). The study made a number of recommendations concerning pre-service and in-service education and highlighted the need for more practical training for trainee-teachers which engaged them in *"active, participatory learning processes"* (*ibid*., p. 39). The findings also recommended a shift from a textbook-centred curriculum to one which allowed teachers the freedom to make decisions about teaching content as well as pedagogy. Another research study conducted in Laos by Chounlamany and Kounphilaphanh (2011) concluded that teaching in TTCs was largely based on traditional strategies and that teachers had little in-depth understanding of learner-centred approaches. The authors called for improved professional development to allow teachers to define a learner-centred approach as well as help for teachers to understand how to implement local curricula. They further argued that central to the reform of teaching practices was reform of the assessment methods and how these methods needed to move away from requiring the production of the 'correct answer' of the textbooks to tasks which required higher order cognitive skills.

A World Bank/Ministry of Education report, *"Teaching in Lao PDR",* (Benveniste, Marshall & Santibañez, 2008), provides a rare overview in a public document of the state of education in Laos. The study, based on secondary sources, uses the Ministry of Education's annual reports on basic educational indicators[85] together with data from a 2006 large-scale survey of lower secondary schools (155 schools; 17% of total); a 2005 Public Expenditure Tracking Survey for information on educational finances (World Bank, 2007b); the NRIES[86] 2005/06

[85] The MoE produces an annual report on basic educational indicators utilising data collected across the sector through its Education Management Information System (EMIS). See for example MoE Annual Bulletins, MoE (2005c, 2009b, 2010b, 2012).
[86] The National Research Institute for Educational Sciences (NRIES) is a unit within the MoE.

Grade 5 Student Achievement Survey (NRIES, 2007); the quantitative study by King and van de Walle (2005) on schooling and poverty in Lao PDR; the six TEADC operational studies mentioned above; and a variety of unpublished internal government reports on educational funding. The following synopsis brings together some of the central points and recommendations of the report:

> *The physical working conditions in the schools are inadequate and are worse in rural areas. There are insufficient numbers of textbooks in both primary and lower secondary schools and few reference or reading books. Teacher salaries are very low (primary: $39/month) and low by comparison with other Asian countries and incentives are insufficient to attract teachers to difficult areas. Salaries for rural and urban teachers are similar but wages in rural areas are often delayed. Many teachers take on additional jobs to supplement their incomes. Teaching is an isolating experience for many teachers in rural schools with few opportunities for continuous professional development through in-service training. Teacher performance, professional standards and teacher accountability need to increase and in-service training should be used to upgrade the quality of teachers. Teachers state they place great emphasis on thinking skills and problem solving but this is not seen in practice. Students in Lao classrooms are mostly passive recipients and there is little chance to apply knowledge. Many students do not develop functional literacy or numeracy. Teachers do not deliver the high quality teaching necessary to develop independent thinking skills in their students. There need to be goals for student learning, and an understanding of how teachers contribute to student outcomes. Strong internal and external accountability measures are important for teacher support and quality assurance. Comprehensive reform is needed to improve the situation of teachers and teaching. The education recurrent budget must expand to provide enough for wages, resources and school operations. Critical reform elements are local area recruitment, improved salaries and incentives, skills upgrading, improved teacher performance, quality assurance and in-service training.*

Two smaller studies related to teaching and learning in rural primary schools in Laos were conducted at the Year 3 level in the remote northern province of Bokeo by Plan International[87] in conjunction with the Ministry of Education with the findings from both studies published in a joint report (ESQAC[88] & Emblen, 2011). The first study, using both classroom tests and teacher interviews, examined student achievement and found a high negative correlation between the number of years of teaching experience of the teachers and the test results of the students in

[87] Plan International is a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) which has been working in Lao PDR since 2007.
[88] ESQAC is the Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center, established by the Lao MoE in 2011.

mathematics and Lao language. In general, younger teachers were found to be more competent in Lao language and mathematics than older but more experienced teachers, and this difference was reflected in the test results achieved by their students. The second study explored the ability of teachers to employ a learner-centred approach in the classroom. Drawing upon questionnaires administered to teachers and principals in thirty rural primary schools, and on observations made of sixty lessons, the researchers concluded that a major obstacle to implementing the government policy of learner-centred education was the superficial understanding teachers had of the meaning and philosophy of the approach. The report concluded that students would benefit if their teachers had greater opportunities for professional development. It suggested that a valuable first step could be to bring teachers together to discuss and explore how to adapt learner-centred approaches in resource-limited environments, with the aim that they then focus on helping children develop their creativity and thinking skills rather than simply continuing to require that the students recall facts and proffer textbook answers.

Other studies of Lao classrooms have been conducted by Lao scholars as part of higher degrees undertaken at overseas universities and funded by donor agencies.[89] Many of these studies draw upon an action research methodology to analyse classroom conditions. Two of these studies are discussed below.

Bounyasone and Keosada (2011), as part of a PhD program, examined how 'student-centred' pedagogy could be implemented in five Lao TTCs. To do this they used action research as their primary research methodology. They concluded that action research was useful for creating teaching approaches which were responsive to local conditions and to the experiences of students. A key recommendation called for the establishment of an *"Educative Action Research Network"* in Laos – one that started at the local level and expanded to the national (*ibid*., p. 153).

A second study by Phommachanh (2008), funded by VSO,[90] also used an action research methodology to explore an induction program for Lao English language teachers working in high schools. The study highlighted the difficult position that the beginning teachers found themselves in when confronted by hierarchical school relationships which required of them compliance with

[89] Over the period 2005 to 2010 sixty government staff were selected to study for a Masters Degree at Umea University in Sweden as part of the TTEST program funded by Sida. Those enrolled were required to complete an action research study related to their field of work. Nine of these research studies were published by the MoE (Sundgren, 2008b).

[90] The Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) is *"... the world's leading independent international development organisation that works through volunteers to fight poverty in developing countries".*

traditional practices for fear of being considered impolite, ambitious or disrespectful to senior colleagues. The study recommends that both pedagogical advisors and older experienced teachers be included in the induction workshops originally intended only for beginning teachers.

The last two sections of this chapter (2.3.10 and 2.3.11) have drawn attention to studies conducted in developing countries on the professional experiences of beginning teachers. Unlike the many studies of formal induction programs undertaken in developed countries, there are few studies on this topic in developing countries. In Laos the intention to develop a program of support for beginning teachers has been mentioned previously in country plans (MoE, 2006a); however, work on designing the program has yet to commence.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides the contextual background for the current study of beginning teachers in Laos. In particular it has illuminated: (i) the challenge which an agenda focused on 'quality' presents to teachers in developing countries; (ii) the factors that influence the implementation of educational reform; and, (iii) the ways beginning teachers cope with the reality of classroom teaching and develop their professional practices. These three topics are now summarised.

The first topic in the chapter examined the provision of educational aid by donor agencies to developing countries and explored the characteristics of the 'quality schools' and 'quality teaching' that the agencies seek to install. In particular, studies that equated 'quality' with a 'learner-centred' approach to teaching were considered. When the local culture is traditionally orientated, the school grossly under-resourced, and the teaching framed by a highly structured, textbook and examination-driven curriculum, any such association was shown to be highly problematic. Some of the studies revealed the limitations of a learner-centred/ teacher-centred dichotomy and suggested that other areas such as 'teacher talk' be considered as ways to improve the quality of learning (Alexander, 2000). The literature on the vexed question of how to assess 'quality' in the classroom was also examined. Studies which look at the merits of using not only checklists and test results but also the pedagogical practices in place in the classroom for this purpose, were reviewed (O'Sullivan, 2006). Overall it was stressed that the responsibility for improving the quality of education ultimately rests with teachers as they struggle in the classroom to make their work more relevant and beneficial to their students.

The second topic dealt with the implementation of educational reform and with the idea that there are both internal and external factors that influence the reform process (Fullan, 2007). The studies examined showed that if student-learning outcomes are to improve, staff at all levels of the educational system require support (Stoll, 1999). Two of the more critical factors which impinge on whether a school can undergo reform are first, the existence of a professional learning community, and second, the role played by the principal (Rosenholtz, 1989; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). While many of the ideas regarding school reform have stemmed from research conducted in developed contexts, there is an increasing body of knowledge that shows how these ideas can be adapted and indigenized for other settings (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000; Kittiphanh, 2011).

The third and final topic is focused on the education of teachers – a process that is central to all education reform (UNESCO, 2004). The studies reviewed on beginning teacher experiences have implications not only for designing appropriate workplace support programs but also for improving pre-service programs. From the review of studies on the professional experiences of beginning teachers three formative factors were identified: (i) the influence of biography and beliefs; (ii) the influence of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired in pre-service programs; and, (iii) the influence of the new workplace. An examination of these factors serves to inform our understandings of beginner teacher responses. The socio-cultural theories of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) were examined and the implications for learning in the workplace were drawn out. Current teacher education practices at both pre-service and induction levels were examined and the programs and strategies judged to be most effective were highlighted. As many of the studies that were reviewed were conducted in western settings, their findings should not be accepted uncritically but evaluated for their suitability within developing contexts. What is apparent from the studies conducted in developing countries is that teachers cannot rely on the provision of a continuum of professional development. Teacher education in these contexts usually involves a pre-service program and then very little formal support once work in school commences.

Unlike the situation in developed countries where there is a wealth of educational research on which to draw, most developing countries, including Laos, have only a very limited amount of ethnographic data about their own educational systems. Where possible, relevant studies conducted in developing countries were considered. The relatively recent work by Lewin and Stuart (2003), O'Sullivan (2010, 2004 & 2006), Tafa (2004), Heneveld *et al.,* (2006), Barrett

(2007), Vavrus (2009) and Westbrook *et al*., (2009) referred to earlier, goes some way towards improving the understanding of the classroom realities for beginning teachers in developing contexts.

This study addresses the knowledge gap which exists regarding the teaching experiences of beginning teachers in rural primary schools in Lao PDR and their professional development needs. Through ethnographic case study research a more informed and nuanced understanding of beginning teachers' experiences is obtained, which could help guide the development of pre-service and professional support programs suitable to the specific needs Laos. As Stuart and Lewin (2002), have commented: *"in order to identify which aspects of teacher education theory and practice developed in high income countries have general relevance, ... research needs to be carried out in each local context"* (p. 211). This study constitutes one such attempt. The next chapter sets out the design of the study.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY: CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

Research, like diplomacy, is the art of the possible.

Patton, 2002, p. 12

3.0 Introduction

The activity of *"... studying outside of one's own cultural boundaries"* (Stenhouse, 1979, p.8), especially in someone else's community or country, is replete with potential difficulties. Patton's quote above implies that research in the social sciences needs to be approached with sensitivity; nowhere is this more so than when the research is conducted in a cross-cultural context wide open for misunderstanding and miscommunication across the cultural divide. But there are dimensions here beyond the social and cultural – in Laos there is always the political. Goudineau (2003), speaking as an anthropologist with many years of experience in Laos, reports that:

> *At the provincial level above all, observers who expect to work for a long time in villages are still regarded with great suspicion, and at present it is exceptional to be able to do fieldwork in the same place over an extended period.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 37)

This chapter documents how approval to undertake research in rural villages in southern Laos was obtained and how the concerns of district officials, village leaders, school principals and classroom teachers were allayed. It describes the pitfalls that were encountered as the research was carried out and how they were circumvented; and it sets out the approaches and methods used in the research.

The chapter commences by outlining the four-stage research design and is then followed by a description of the interpretive paradigm which frames the research. The ethnographic and case study methodologies used to investigate the research questions are justified and issues concerning their application examined, such as the ethics of the research. Each of the research methods used - interviews, observations, journals and so on - are discussed, and the processes of data collection and analysis described. Finally issues associated with research reliability and validity, particularly those relevant to cross-cultural research, are examined.

3.1 Research Design

The four-stage research design is summarised in Table 3.1 below. Eighteen months were spent in Laos establishing the study, carrying out data collection in rural villages and schools, running a re-call workshop for beginning teachers at the end of their first year of teaching, and validating the research findings with the four main participants. Time in Laos spent actively furthering the study, whether gaining approvals, undertaking classroom observations, conducting interviews, or providing feedback to participants, is referred to as 'fieldwork'. This includes the Stage 2 period spent undertaking data collection in the villages and schools and is referred to specifically as 'ethnographic fieldwork.'

The research design evolved over the course of the study. While all four stages were included as elements of the design from the beginning, it was not until the research process was underway that the design took on its final shape. As circumstances changed or opportunities arose the design was modified if it strengthened the study. The four stages of the research each had their own purposes and each stage followed after the successful completion of the previous one.

Table 3.1: Four-stage fieldwork research design

Stage	Activity	Primary Location	Period	Duration (months)
1.	**Establishing the Research** • Gaining ministerial approval for research • Evaluating trainee-teacher experiences and expectations • Identifying and recruiting four beginning teachers • Gaining district and village level approval for research	MoE, Vientiane Pakse TTC Pakse TTC Champasak Province	Feb 2009 to Aug 2009	7
2.	**Undertaking Ethnographic Fieldwork** • Undertaking ethnographic research in four rural villages • Interspersed on-going data analysis	Champasak Province Champasak Province	Sep 2009 to May 2010	9
3.	**Providing Feedback to Participants** • Organising beginning teacher re-call workshop • Conducting beginning teacher re-call workshop	Pakse TTC Pakse TTC	Jun 2010	1
4.	**Validating the Research Findings** • Examination of findings by beginning teachers • Discussion of findings with senior MoE officials	Pakse TTC MoE, Vientiane	Jul 2011	1

3.1.1 Stage 1: Establishing the research

The first task in Stage 1 was to seek approval from senior authorities in the Lao Ministry of Education (MoE) to undertake the proposed research. Later, it was necessary to obtain the support of other officials at the provincial, district and village levels. These approvals took approximately two months to negotiate. Associated ethical issues are discussed in Section 3.4.1 below.

During Stage 1, five months were spent in the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC) with three aims. First, I sought to follow the progress of a cohort of 69 trainee-teachers over the second half of their one-year pre-service training course.[91] These trainees, typically still in their teens, had grown up in small rural towns or villages and had gone straight from completion of Year 11 High School to the TTC. I also sought background information about their course through observations in lecture rooms, interviews with lecturers, involvement in the six-week course practicum, and analysis of curriculum documents. Second, I wanted to ascertain the expectations trainee-teachers had about their careers as teachers through surveys, focus group discussions and interviews. Third, and of greatest importance, I wanted to recruit four trainee-teachers, who, after graduation, would be involved in this study as beginning teachers in different rural primary schools in Champasak Province. In the second stage of the research the aim would be to monitor the professional experiences of these four beginning teachers over the course of their first year of teaching.

The process of selection and recruitment of the four beginning teachers began with extensive written and oral disclosure to the cohort of 69 trainee-teachers about the aims, objectives and nature of the research. Considerable interest in the project was generated and all trainees self-nominated for potential inclusion as participants in the study.[92] The initial group of 69 was then reduced to the 40 who were most likely to be employed after graduation (the 30 trainees on government scholarships who were likely to receive preferential appointment and 10 other trainees with strong Village Committee support), and then reduced further through a survey, and performance within focus group discussions, to a group of 20. These trainees agreed to keep a teaching journal throughout the six-week practicum component of their course and were observed and videoed teaching in the classroom. After practicum the selection process continued with further interviews and with the involvement of course lecturers to determine the most articulate and confident of the students.

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91 Details of this course are supplied in Chapter 4.

92 See Appendix 3 for an English translation of the consent form.

Finally, further selection criteria were applied so that the chosen group of four trainee-teachers would ideally: (i) come from different districts in Champasak Province so that comparisons could be made about the kinds of support which the different District Education Bureau (DEBs) provided to beginning teachers; (ii) be committed to working in a medium-sized school in a rural area so that there would be the potential for support for the beginning teachers from colleagues; and, (iii) be two men and two women so that there would be gender balance amongst the participants.

After discussions with the Champasak Provincial Education Service (PES) approval was given to present the names of the four trainee-teachers to the relevant DEBs. Subsequently each trainee was employed and assigned, as hoped, to a medium-sized rural primary school in their own district. However, the selection and deployment of the trainee-teachers involved long and delicate negotiations, and right up until the day the new school year commenced there was no guarantee that they would be appointed at all, let alone in a way that would satisfy the selection criteria for the study. The fact that they were so appointed came about through a combination of having ministerial approval for the study, local knowledge and relationships, and perseverance. Methodological and ethical issues concerning the five-month period in Stage 1 spent in the Pakse TTC are discussed in Section 3.4.1, while Chapter 4 presents the findings from this initial stage of the study.

3.1.2 Stage 2: Undertaking ethnographic fieldwork

Stage 2 was the primary data collection phase when ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken in four rural villages in Champasak Province. The focus was the professional experiences of the four beginning teachers over their first year of teaching and this was used to produce four case studies[93] and ultimately to address the research questions. Stage 2 commenced in September 2009 at the beginning of the 2009/2010 school year and continued across the next 9 months until its conclusion in May 2010. During this time each of the four villages was visited six times – two one-day introductory/liaison visits per village (referred to in the text as liaison visits), and four one-week observation visits per school (referred to in the text as observation visit 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively). Appendix 4 shows how the visits were scheduled across the 36-week school year into four month-long blocks with the time between each block spent mainly at the Pakse TTC undertaking analysis of the data collected to that point. An indication of the types of data collection typically undertaken in each village and school during each of the week-long observation visits is given in Table 3.2 below.

[93] See Appendix 1 for case records of each of the four beginning teachers.

Table 3.2: Data collection activities during week-long observation visits

Participant	Data collection activity	Frequency
Beginning teacher	• Observations of classroom lessons using running records	daily
	• Video recording of lesson	1 per visit
	• Conversations about teaching issues	daily
	• Semi-structured interviews about teacher learning	3 per visit
	• Discussions about self-reflective recordings (journals and photographs)	1 per visit
School staff	• Semi-structured interviews about teaching and general school activities	1 per visit
School principal	• Semi-structured interviews about teaching and general school activities	2 per visit
Community member	• Semi-structured interviews about the school in the life of the village	2 per visit
Community	• Observations of daily life in village and school recorded in journal notes	daily

During the eighteen weeks of liaison and observation visits I stayed in the villages and this enabled me to observe not only school activities but also something of daily life in the four communities. In between the observation visits, communication was maintained with the beginning teachers where possible, by the research assistant, through regular mobile phone calls.[94]

3.1.3 Stage 3: Providing feedback to participants

Under the design of the research no interventions would be made during the visits by myself or the research assistant that might alter the way in which the beginning teachers were undertaking their teaching. Instead, a professional activity of some sort would be held after Stage 2 to provide feedback to the four participants about their work and to thank them for their involvement in the study. As observation visits progressed various ideas for Stage 3 started to emerge, and with the approval of the Pakse TTC and the Champasak PES, it was decided to run a week-long workshop, not just for the four participants but for 26 other teachers in Champasak who were at the end of their first year of teaching. A 'beginning teacher re-call workshop' was subsequently held in June 2010, at the end of the school year, at the Pakse TTC to address the questions and concerns of the participants.[95]

[94] A very cheap mobile phone service is becoming increasingly accessible in Laos. Coverage is not universal but is reasonable within a 20 km radius of most district centres and all four villages in this study could be contacted. Some financial assistance was given to the beginning teachers to enable them to purchase a phone and to initiate as well as receive research-related calls.

[95] Funding for the workshop (including travel, acommodation and food for participants, and faciitation fees for TTC lecturers) came from an Australian NGO – Australian People for Health, Education, and Development Abroad (APHEDA). Funding for the 30 participants to each receive a 'teaching kit' came from private donations.

3.1.4 Stage 4: Validating the research findings

The final stage of the research design was for a return visit to Laos to present my findings to the four beginning teachers and to check with them that their views were not misrepresented. A year after the Stage 3 re-call workshop was held, I returned and met the teachers individually at the Pakse TTC to validate my findings with them. During the same visit to Laos, I also met with senior officials in the MoE who had given the original approval for the research, and discussed with them the sensitive nature of my findings. These issues are discussed further in Section 3.3.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Definitions of 'research paradigm' range from Guba's (1990) *"basic set of beliefs that guide action"* (p. 17) to extensive formulations such as that by Terre Blanche (1999): *"Paradigms are all encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology"* (p. 6). The choice of research paradigm therefore has both philosophical and methodological implications. This study is framed by an 'interpretive paradigm' based on the acceptance that *"... reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing"* (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 6). Within this paradigm the ontological considerations reflect a world of multiple realities in which *"... reality is internally experienced, is socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors, and is based on the definition people attach to it"* (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 36). This study investigates the reality of teaching for four beginning teachers through their emic perceptions of work in rural primary schools, and from the researcher's etic observations.[96] The emic perceptions, drawn primarily from interviews and conversations in the field, along with the etic perceptions derived from the observations and interpretations gathered during field visits, bring together the realities which form the multifaceted world of the four beginning teachers.

The epistemological beliefs of the interpretative paradigm assume that the relationships between the researcher and the participants are interdependent and that in these relationships meanings are co-constructed and co-created (Terre Blanche, 1999). Stemming from these beliefs the researcher *"...use[s] methodologies (such as interviewing or participant observation) that rely on a subjective relationship between researcher and subject"* (*ibid.*, p. 6). This relationship requires the researcher to be aware of his or her position in relation to the

[96] The term "emic", for an account of belief or behaviour coming from a person within the culture, and "etic" for an account of the phenomena coming from the supposedly 'neutral' external observer, follows the usage by Harris (1976).

subjects of the study. As Denzin (2001) comments: *"The qualitative researcher is not an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the study of the social world. Rather the researcher is historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied"* (p. 3).

Early in the design of this research it was decided that I would not intentionally engage in any change process, and in keeping with the interpretive paradigm seek 'understanding' rather than 'action'.[97] Denzin (2001), however, makes the case that an interpretative paradigm can be used to *"... identify strategic points of intervention into social situations"* (p. 2). The aim of this study was to work towards an increased understanding of the needs of beginning teachers, but an understanding with a purpose - so that the knowledge gained could inform the recommendations for professional development programs for beginning teachers, as are provided in Chapter 8.

3.3 Research Methodology

The study was undertaken to find out what beginning teachers in Laos 'do' and 'think' about their work. While there is a wealth of studies in developed countries on teachers' practices, one of the few studies which has documented teachers' practices in Laos was conducted through the TTEST Project (TEADC, 2004a). However, there have been no ethnographic case studies looking into the 'restricted'[98] worlds of rural teachers. While considering methodologies which matched the beliefs inherent in an interpretive paradigm, I was drawn towards Neuman's advocacy (2006) of *"... systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings to arrive at understandings of how people create and maintain their social worlds"* (p. 88). I subsequently decided that an understanding of the lives of beginning teachers could best be obtained through an eclectic approach adopting methods central to ethnography as proposed by Spradley (1979), Spindler (1982), Wolcott (2001; 2008), and Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), and to educational case study methodology developed by Stake (1995; 2005), Bassey (1999) and Yin (2009).

[97] The issue of the researcher's impact on the setting is discussed further in Section 3.4.3.

[98] Schools are 'restricted' in the sense that foreigners require special permission in order to visit a school. Invariably the person or delegation will be accompanied by one or more government officers and any unauthorised visit would always be reported by the principal to 'higher authorities' in the DEB.

3.3.1 Ethnography

This study is focused on specific aspects of teacher education and school life: first, on the trainee-teachers' experiences during their training course, and later, on their experiences as beginning teachers in village schools. Ethnography was selected as the primary research methodology with which to understand their experiences. The methodology involves the researcher not simply collecting data about people but learning from people (Spradley, 1979). As Wolcott (2008) emphasises, the methodology of ethnography is more than simply *"...borrowing (some) ethnographic techniques"* (p. 44). Rather, the purpose of ethnography is:

> *...to describe what the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings they ascribe to the doing, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to regularities that implicate cultural process.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 73)

From an ontological perspective, the purpose of ethnographic research is *"... not to determine the truth but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in other people's lives"* (Emerson *et al.,* 1995, p. 3). And to understand the teachers' realities, an approach which required immersion in their worlds, rather than detachment from them, was seen as most appropriate. Such an immersion *"... involves both being with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experiencing for oneself these events and the circumstances that gave rise to them*" (*ibid*., p. 2). In this study, immersion into the worlds of the beginning teachers took place over a school year and occurred in each of four villages.

The epistemological dimension of an ethnographic study is dependent on the critical judgment of the researcher as to what is recorded in the context of what is revealed by the participants (Stenhouse, 1979). What was revealed to me, and what selected, was bound up in the relationships which developed between myself as the researcher, my research assistant, and the beginning teachers as the participants. The folly of *"blitzkrieg ethnography"* in which *"... rapport, familiarity, trust and insight are all manufactured instantaneously"* (Rist, 1980, p. 9) was avoided by establishing relations with each of the participants during the initial five month period in the TTC (Stage 1) and then by furthering my relationships with each of the teachers throughout the following year in their schools and homes (Stage 2). Although the time spent in the villages was not continuous it was spaced across a school year and involved

sustained periods of highly intensive engagement while living in the villages and observing in classrooms.[99]

3.3.2 Case studies

Over thirty years ago Stenhouse (1979) called for the *"... adoption of [the] case study approach to inform educational practices"* (p. 10). Since then, the use of case study methodology has been further developed (Stake, 1995, 2005; Bassey, 1999; Yin, 1984, 2009). For Stake (2005) *"case study is about making choices of what is to be studied"* (p. 443) while for Yin (2009) case study is appropriate as a methodology when one wants to explore "*contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"* (p. 18). From Merriam's (2009) perspective, case study is useful when *"... the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many"* (p. 224). Further support for the value of undertaking ethnographic case studies in cross-cultural settings comes from Crossley and Vulliamy (1984; 1997) who have worked extensively in developing contexts. They argue that detailed descriptive case studies can help expose rhetoric and isolate actual school practices, and that the qualitative nature of such studies can *"... probe the policy/practice interface [and] add depth to more large scale research studies"* (Crossley & Vulliamy 1997, p. 13). All of these positions spoke to my own interest in investigating the practices of beginning teachers in the school setting.

The phenomena of interest in this study are the professional lives of the beginning teachers. A sample of four beginning teachers was chosen as this was the maximum number which I felt I could accommodate, both physically and emotionally, over the space of one year. In practice, developing and maintaining a rapport with each of the beginning teachers, and getting to know the relevant community members for each teacher, including parents, other relatives, school principal and colleagues, taxed the limits of my energy and resources.

An ethnographic case study approach to exploring the research questions, provided an opportunity to gather more data than if I had simply visited schools on specific days to 'conduct interviews' and make 'periodic observations' of specific classroom lessons. The intensive fieldwork, provided an opportunity to observe the 'flow of life' and for 'rich' or 'thick' data to emerge. As Geertz (1973) explains, the ethnographer has the task of making sense of a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures: *"... strange, irregular and inexplicit*

[99] See Appendix 4 for a schedule of the ethnographic fieldwork visits in Stage 2.

... which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render" (p. 10). Grasping such meaning was only possible by entering the worlds of the four teachers. It was the experience of being in the field, without any government 'minders', which provided an opportunity for me to share experiences and record a unique set of data. The freedom I had to visit villages unaccompanied, the intensive and sustained time spent in the field, and the relationships which developed between myself, the research assistant and the four teachers, characterised the ethnographic case study methodology of the research.

Stake (2005) argues that a case study is *"... both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry"* (p. 444). He then extols the virtues of the case study as a way of reporting as it allows readers *"... to experience these happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions"* (*ibid.*, p. 450). In Appendix 1 four case records are presented which provide diachronic and holistic accounts of the beginning teachers' worlds. Then, in chapters 5 and 6, descriptive comparative accounts are given, which document the common as well as the idiosyncratic happenings across the four cases.

3.4 Research Considerations

3.4.1 Research ethics

This study was guided by a set of ethical principles for school-based research put forward by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982). They include: observation of local protocols; seeking authorisation prior to visiting or observing; seeking authorisation to access written material; involving participants in decisions about research activities; negotiating with other significant community members about their participation in research activities (interviews, observations, community events); accepting responsibility for maintaining confidentiality; and negotiating reports for various levels of release. The study commenced, of course, only after it had been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at RMIT.

However, approval to undertake the research was first sought in Laos, by submission to the Vice-Minister of Education, Mrs Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun. With the focus of the research on teacher induction, a topic of considerable interest within the Government of Lao's (GoL) reform agenda,[100] permission was granted by way of a signed decree.[101] As well as addressing a need within the Lao education system, approval to undertake the research

[100] A critical area identified for reform is teacher education and one of the planned strategies is the development of a system of professional support for beginning teachers, including the establishment of an induction program. Detailed plans are set out in the *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010)* (MoE, 2006a).

[101] See Appendix 5 for a copy of this decree and its English translation.

reflected the trust in my professionalism that had developed within the MoE over the seven years since I first commenced work in Laos in 2003.

However, Stake (2005) warns: *"... authorisation does not constitute license to invade the privacy of others"* (p. 459). It was with this in mind that I also sought local consent in person, first from the Director of the Pakse TTC to undertake Stage 1 at the College; and then from the Director of the Champasak PES, from senior officials in the four relevant DEBs from the four school principals and from the local authorities in the four villages, to undertake Stage 2.[102] Although staff at the TTC had had quite extensive experience with participatory action research projects, none of the people at the village level had previously been involved in educational or anthropological research. Therefore most time was invested at this level explaining the research project to village committee members and school staff. Even though the official decree gave me entry into the villages and the schools, I still needed local cooperation in order to actually conduct the research by being left alone to observe and talk with each of the beginning teachers and engage in their worlds unhindered by 'authority'.

Being an outsider, a non-Lao, a *falang*, I was conscious of the privilege that I had been afforded by being permitted to enter Lao villages , but conscious also that my right to reside there could be withdrawn at any time. I was also mindful of Laos' colonial history and of issues associated with the appropriation of knowledge by colonial powers (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008). As noted, none of the communities had any prior experience with researchers, therefore I took some trouble to make the research process clear. I informed villagers about the purpose and process of the research using both written and oral information and provided consent forms in plain language allowing people to voluntarily participate in the study if they chose. Each Village Committee was provided with a timetable of visits and this was generally adhered to except when weather or village activities prevented travel. The planned schedule helped community members realise that I was not making 'surprise' visits and allayed fears such as those expressed by one principal who initially thought that I might be 'checking on him'.[103]

A key ethical issue was how to respond to the requests from teachers for advice and support. As I did not want to influence the way the beginning teachers taught I resisted giving on-site advice and instead promised to organise a five-day workshop at the end of the research period so that the questions they had raised could be discussed. This 're-call workshop' was

[102] See Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 for comment on 'local authorities' - the Village Committee (VC) and the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) respectively.
[103] See Appendix 1, Case Record 1 for details of this incident.

incorporated as a third stage in the research process (see 3.3.1). In this way I responded to the requests by the teachers for advice and tried 'to give something back' in appreciation for the time, trust and welcome I received from them and their families.

The most important ethical problem encountered during the fieldwork, and again during the write-up, was how to protect the individual. Stake (2005) reminds us: *"The value of the best research is not likely to outweigh injury to a person exposed"* (p. 459). Neuman (2006) reinforces this belief when he asserts that the researcher *"... has a moral obligation to uphold the confidentiality of data"* (p. 413); and Wolcott (2005) explores the *"... issue of betrayal"* (p. 139) when confidentiality is not maintained. Shortly after the commencement of the fieldwork, I realised I was gathering data which potentially portrayed Lao educational practices in a negative light. Although I had worked on education projects in Laos for a number of years before conducting this research, I had never before directly heard the opinions I was hearing in the field. This was now happening because: first, I was conducting my visits unconstrained by government officials; and, second, the trust which developed towards the research team emboldened the teachers to discuss sensitive issues.

The key participants, the four beginning teachers, were all young (late teens or early twenties) and awaiting permanent positions. Their information was given in trust that confidentiality would be maintained. And while it is my interpretations of what I saw and heard which some authorities could potentially take umbrage at, it would not be in the best interests of the four teachers and their careers to be associated with those interpretations. The question to be answered then is how can the participants be protected. This issue was discussed with senior staff in the MoE who suggested it be resolved by 'selective reporting' (Patton, 2002) within Laos, with the provincial and district authorities requiring only a briefing paper in Lao outlining the findings and recommendations, while full and confidential reporting be made only to the Vice-Minister.

3.4.2 Working cross-culturally

It goes without saying that an understanding of the culture in which the study is set is necessary in order to approach data collection in a culturally sensitive manner and issues of culture were discussed earlier in 2.2.7. Kittiphanh (2011), writing about the constraints on the conduct of research in Laos states that typically: *"The Party guides national policy and sits behind and above all significant decision making. This hierarchical aspect may constrain people, especially those who work at the grassroots level"* (p. 57). This situation may have a

special significance for an 'outsider' seeking to have the 'less powerful members' of a school staff speak openly about their workplace experiences.

In addition to cultural issues, the one-party system of governance in Laos brings with it the additional challenge for the researcher of having to interact with government officials who might be unwilling to communicate with 'outsiders', especially with those perceived to be in positions of 'higher power'. De Turk (2001) writes how in situations where there is high social and political power *"... subordinates learn that direct, honest relations are dangerous, and that open communication is possible only with each other"* (p. 378). Through my previous work in Laos, I had learnt strategies appropriate for successfully working inter-culturally so that a consensus approach was used to make decisions, direct criticism against individuals were avoided at all costs, and the 'positive' aspects of people's work were always highlighted. Boas (1997), in a paper for UNDP workers in Laos, advocates similar strategies.

My position of 'researcher' was influenced by the fact that although I was an outsider to the culture, my 'foreign-ness' meant that I was also seen as outside the existing set of power relations within the educational hierarchy and, of course, outside the 'Party' system. Being an outsider with no formal position, no power, and no funds to dispense was an advantage in these circumstances. Once I had been accepted as someone who would not be passing judgement or sending information to 'higher authorities', teachers relaxed and I was able to observe 'school' in its raw reality.[104]

A further advantage of being an outsider was that the beginning teachers could opt out of participation whenever they chose and for however long they wished.[105] There was little obligation on the teachers to answer the questions I posed and they could *"... be disobliged in a way that would have spelled trouble had it been directed against any insider"* (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 680). Therefore while I was accepting of whatever responses were offered, it was equally important to note what was not said.

3.4.3 Reflexivity

Both ethnographic and case study methodologies draw attention to the importance of reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2002; Etherington, 2006; Patton, 2002). Goldbart and Hustler (2005) highlight that we are part of the social worlds we are studying and the researcher's own interpretative processes need to be taken into account. This is reflexivity, which in cross-

[104] People needed to see that I was not concerned that lesson plans had not been written out beforehand or that school timetables were flexible and dependent on local circumstances.
[105] In fact, all of the beginning teachers remained in the study throughout the year of the fieldwork.

cultural contexts sits astride the journal notes challenging judgments and interpretations and assumptions. As Wolcott (2005) has it *"... that's culture at work. But it's your culture, not theirs!"* (p. 91). Recognising one's own role in the complicated cross-cultural research process is the first step in being reflexive.

In this study reflexivity as process was practiced as I considered the effect which my presence had on the lives and professional practice of the teachers. Reflective memos were written for private consumption and sat as a commentary on the journal notes. And at all times I tried to keep in mind the caution that the researcher "*... never observes the behavioural event which 'would have taken place' in his absence, nor hears an account identical with that which the same narrator would give to another person"* (Devereux, 1967, p. 6, original emphasis). While this is a study of beginning teachers in Laos and not of my involvement in their experiences, my presence as observer is evident in chapters 5 and 6. An example of the journal notes, from which the bulk of the material in those chapters is drawn, is included as Appendix 6.

3.4.4 Negotiating an identity

Building trust and rapport with participants is intricately bound up with developing an identity. Angrosino *et al.,* (2000) have described the dynamic process whereby the ethnographer negotiates a *"situational identity"* (p. 638), which grows in line with the relationship with the participants. In my own case my 'situational identity' developed as I spent extended periods of time in the field – both in the schools and in the villages. Time spent building trust led to an acceptance of my assurances of confidentiality and this allowed participants to relax and go about their work. According to the reports by the beginning teachers, my presence at the back of the classroom was all but forgotten within a few days.

Most foreigners visiting village schools in Laos are linked to aid projects of one kind or another – either small NGOs or large international donors. This was my own situation when I worked as an 'Education Advisor' in the TTCs and the MoE but funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Coming to this new study, however, I was neither linked to nor sponsored by a foreign aid program. Therefore during the introductory visits to villages I made it clear to the principals and village committee members that allowing me into their schools would not bring financial support or project benefits. However, as the year progressed, opportunities arose and I was able to help three of the four schools to prepare

submissions for funding from various donors.[106] The initial message was therefore transformed from "*I don't have any funds"* to *"I can help you learn how to apply for funding"*. Similarly, relationships with the parents of the four teachers I was observing were established on the understanding that I had no power to facilitate permanency for their son or daughter. And amongst the four beginning teachers, as relationships developed, I was accepted as a 'learner' rather than as an 'advisor'. Throughout the fieldwork period I reminded them (and myself) that I was not there to provide advice but 'to learn'. However, as discussed in Section 3.1.3, I promised that I would arrange some form of professional activity for the beginning teachers at the end of the year so that the questions they raised about teaching could be discussed.

Empathy, *"...a process of building shared meaning"* (De Turk, 2001, p. 377), is central to communication between the researcher, research assistant and the participants. In this study empathy developed as I observed what the beginning teachers were experiencing. For example, I was present while one of the beginning teachers tried to supervise five classes at once while his colleagues were absent. This allowed me to observe, if not experience, the difficulties the teacher faced rather than just hear them recounted. Seeing the teachers in a school react to an unscheduled 'inspectorial' visit by DEB officials allowed me to understand the basis of the stress they felt and later recounted. Experiencing such events together showed the beginning teachers that I 'understood' what they were talking about, as I had observed them happening. They also knew that I was seeing activities and situations which were normally not spoken of - teacher absences, unconscionable workloads, exaggerated test results, questionable records – and this allowed more open discussion of a world normally hidden from 'outsiders'.

3.4.5 Working with an interpreter

Although my own language skills were adequate for day-to-day survival in Laos, I needed someone to help interpret the Lao which would be spoken in the de-contextualised settings of interviews, and, of equal importance, someone who would assist me to navigate cultural differences. A key factor that enabled me to carry out the research in a foreign culture and language was the selection of the 'right' research assistant – someone who had both language skills and cultural competence. Bragason (1997), working in cross-cultural situations in Thailand, comments: *"The cooperation and mutual understanding of researcher*

[106] $800 for a school wall and $3,000 for beginning teacher resource kits from a private Norwegian donor; $1,500 for school roofing materials and a well from a private Australian donor; and, $9,000 from the Australian Embassy in Lao PDR Discretionary Aid Program (DAP) for school improvements.

and interpreter is something that takes time to develop. The task of the interpreter is not only translating what is being said during an interview; the interpreter is active in the interview situation" (p. 3). Working with an interpreter was thus more than a simple linguistic exercise - it also involved a *"... mediation of cultures"* (Bujra, 2006, p. 172).

Fortunately I was able to secure the services of Ms Sivilay Phommachanh, a friend and colleague who I had worked with previously for several years and who was already familiar with my ways of working. Ms Sivilay is a woman in her early 30s with a background in both classroom teaching and TTC lecturing. She is a native Lao speaker and fluent in English. Her own schooling was undertaken on the outskirts of Pakse and she was consequently very familiar with many of the situations which I was researching. In 2007 she had studied in Australia and there had the opportunity to learn something about western education. The support given to both of us by the Pakse TTC in granting her leave, allowed me to employ Ms Sivilay to work with me for the full 18 months duration of the fieldwork. It was not only her linguistic and cultural competence that were so impressive, but also her bright personality which put the young teachers at ease and which helped us to be accepted into their homes and schools.

In practice, one of Ms Sivilay's major roles was to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible when being observed and interviewed by a *'falang'*. For each of the beginning teachers it was the first time they had had contact with a foreigner, making Verhoeven's advice (2000) particularly pertinent:

> *Cross-cultural interviews should take place in spheres of openness and understanding. Already, from the start an interviewer should show that he is interested in all kinds of information the interviewee can provide, and that there is no reason whatsoever that the interviewee will lose face when answers do not fit the ideas of the interviewer.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 6)

On balance the advantages of working with an interpreter far outweighed the disadvantages of not using an interpreter, and this study is that much richer for the dedication and commitment to the task shown by Ms Sivilay.

3.5 Data Collection

Ethnography and case study methodologies share a range of research methods including participant observation, interviews and document analysis. The selection of methods for this study followed Bassey's (1999) suggestion: *"Work out your own methods - from a clear ethical standpoint, and based on your research questions"* (p. 81). The methods were also selected based on the warning that certain approaches may only *"...reproduce the rhetoric of policy"* (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1984, p. 198). While this study contains a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, the use of each was predicated on the central focus of developing and maintaining direct, ongoing contact with the participants. The methods of observation, interviews, surveys, focus groups, journals, photographic records and document analysis are examined below.

The intention in Stage 2 of the research was to capture the beginning teachers' perceptions about their work, including the difficulties they encountered, their frustrations and their achievements. However, before the research methods could be used to observe the daily life of the classroom, trust and rapport needed to develop. Initial contact took place over five months in the Pakse TTC. When we met again in their home villages during the first weeks of the new school year, all four beginning teachers were surprisingly forthcoming about their situations. In some ways talking with an 'outsider', but someone they already knew, gave them an opportunity to talk about the unexpected challenges and demands of their job without being judged by their colleagues.

Table 3.3 below provides a summary of the main data collection methods used in Stage 1 in the Pakse TTC, and in Stage 2 in the villages and schools. These included surveys, focus groups, lecture observations, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations. Journal notes recording daily observations in the TTC and villages also provided a rich data stream, but are not included in this summary table. Further details on each method are provided in the following sections.

Table 3.3: Summary of main data collection methods used in Stages 1 and 2

Stage	Schedule	Method	Participants	Number of participants	Purpose
1	Mar 09	Survey 1	Trainee-teachers	40	• To explore trainees' expectations of teaching • Part 1 of process to select 4 beginning teachers
	Mar 09	Focus groups	Trainee-teachers	40	• To explore trainees' expectations of teaching • Part 2 of process to select 4 beginning teachers
	Mar 09	Lecture observations	TTC lecturers	7	• To examine teaching methodology used in pre-service course
	Apr 09	Observation Interviews	Trainee-teachers	20	• Practicum • To explore trainees' expectations of teaching • Part 3 of process to select 4 beginning teachers
	May 09	Interviews	Trainee-teachers	20	• To explore trainees' expectations of teaching • Part 4 of process to select 4 beginning teachers
	May 09	Interviews	TTC lecturers	7	• To explore the challenges TTC lecturers face in their work
	Jun 09	Survey 2	Trainee-teachers	40	• To explore the trainees' experiences of the course and practicum.
	Jun 09	Interviews	Trainee-teachers	20	• To explore trainees' expectations of teaching • Part 5 of process to select 4 beginning teachers
	Jul 09	Interviews	PES staff DEB staff	12	• To explore provision of support to beginning teachers
2	09/10 school year	Observation Interviews Conversations	Beginning teachers	4	• To investigate teaching experiences and learning opportunities of beginning teachers
	09/10 school year	Interviews Conversations	School principals	4	• To explore provision of support for beginning teachers
	09/10 school year	Interviews Conversations	School staff	22	• To explore provision of support for beginning teachers
	09/10 school year	Interviews Conversations	Community members	24	• To explore community attitudes towards teachers and schooling
	09/10 school year	Interviews Conversations	DEB staff	8	• To explore provision of support to beginning teachers

NOTE: The Lao school year and the tertiary academic year ostensibly run from 1 September to 1 June.

3.5.1 Observations

Stake (1995) and Bassey (1999) emphasise observation as a key method in case study methodology, while Yin (2009) asserts that case studies can sometimes be conducted without *"... direct and detailed observational evidence"* (p. 19). However, by virtue of its ethnographic focus, this study relies extensively on observational data. As Emerson *et al*., (1995) argue*: "... the distinctive procedure is to observe and record naturally occurring talk and interaction"* (p. 140). However, learning from naturally occurring incidents relied on

more than just making isolated visits. As highlighted above, substantial time was spent in the field in order to *"... delve below the surface of the 'official' versions"* (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1984, p. 199).

When observing I tried to heed Wolcott's (2008) advice and *"... become only as involved as necessary to obtain the information desired"* (p. 52). Observations in the classroom were therefore mostly conducted in a non-participatory way - sitting at the back watching how the teacher was engaging with the students. While this was easy to do in TTC situations, it was not always straightforward in the village schools. For example, just sitting back watching while the new Grade 1 teacher tried to teach his own class of 60 students and simultaneously mind four other classes for absent teachers, was an uncomfortable experience. When asked to mind his class while he left the room, I had little choice but to shift from 'passive observer' to 'active participant'. In general though, the beginning teachers did not ask for help unless there was an emergency. Principals also allowed me to observe without asking for reports on the teachers. After school my observations continued, but now I endeavoured to participate as appropriate - attending cultural or religious events, preparing meals, or helping teachers work in their fields.

Observations of daily life, both at the TTC and in the villages, were recorded as journal notes. Observations of lessons were recorded using 'running records' focused on the teaching strategies of the teachers as well as on the students' participation. An examples of a running record is given in Appendix 7. Videos were also used to supplement written records. In Stage 1, each of the 20 trainee-teachers on practicum gave a lesson which was videoed. In Stage 2, one lesson during each weekly visit was videoed giving a total of 16 videoed lessons taught by beginning teachers over the year. A copy of each videoed lesson was given to the relevant teacher to keep.

Observations were carried out in a variety of contexts. During Stage 1 these were of TTC lecturers delivering lessons, of teacher trainees on practicum, and of daily life around the TTC. During Stage 2 my time was split between observing formal lessons in class and observing and participating in village life, especially after school hours. Each of these observational contexts, grouped by stage, is briefly discussed below.

(i) Stage 1: Lessons delivered by lecturers at the Pakse TTC

Over the course of a semester, seven lecturers were observed delivering two lessons each in one of the seven core subjects - Principles of Primary School Teaching, Methodology for Teaching Maths, Teaching Lao Language, Teaching the World Around Us, Child

Psychology, English, and Practicum Preparation - to trainee-teachers studying for the one-year Diploma in Teaching. Observations were made from the back of the classroom and a running record kept to document the teaching strategies employed. Discussions were held with the lecturer immediately after the lesson.

(ii) Stage 1: Lessons delivered by trainee-teachers on pre-service course practicum

As part of their training course the trainee-teachers went on a six-week practicum.[107] An initial group of 20 trainee-teachers who had nominated to be involved in the study, were asked to choose a lesson to deliver which would be observed and videoed. Initial visits were made to each of the six urban primary schools where the trainees were assigned to explain the purpose of the research and to obtain consent. Subsequently each trainee was videoed teaching a lesson, and as it was the first time any of them had had such an experience, all were understandably nervous. While the videos that resulted were not considered representative of ordinary lessons, they were used in the process leading up to the selection of the four beginning teachers.

(iii) Stage 1: Daily observations at the TTC

Throughout the final semester of the trainees' pre-service course, I maintained journal notes of my daily experiences and observations in the TTC. These journal notes included records of classroom observations, interviews, conversations and reflective memos.

(iv) Stage 2: Observations of village life

By arranging to stay in the villages during the observation weeks I gained knowledge about the contextual setting of the school. Over the sixteen weeks spent living in the villages, journal notes were kept on incidental observations and on my everyday interactions.

(v) Stage 2: Observations of beginning teachers in the classroom

The classroom observations were the central part of the fieldwork conducted in each village. As I was in the classroom all day during the week-long visits, both the teachers and the students soon became familiar with my presence. As previously mentioned, I was aware from previous visits to schools that if I had limited the time spent in the classroom I would probably have observed mainly 'performances'.

During the school day, when specific lessons from the textbook were delivered, I maintained a running record. This focused on recording what the teacher did and what teaching strategies were used. In total 155 lessons were formally observed and recorded.

[107] See Chapter 4 for details about the pre-service course practicum.

Sixteen of those lessons were also videoed, one lesson per week-long visit, and these were used with the teacher as a stimulus for discussion. When the 16 video-recorded lessons were compared with the everyday lessons, substantial differences were apparent. First, when the camera was recording the students were quieter which allowed the teachers to get on with the task of teaching rather than having to manage behaviour; and second, teachers tended to bring in a teaching aid or two to use in the videoed lessons. This finding confirmed the value of spending extended periods of time in each classroom in order to find out how lessons were usually conducted.

Table 3.4: Number of classroom lessons delivered by beginning teachers that were formally observed including the number of lessons that were also videoed[108]

Beginning Teacher	Number of classroom lessons formally observed	Number of classroom lessons also videoed
Bounyang	40	4
Tiputai	36	4
Khamxing	37	4
Seng	42	4
Total	**155**	**16**

In addition to the running records maintained of these formal lessons, I also maintained a journal for observations of other classroom events such as taking the roll, reciting tables, singing or playing games to 'settle' the class, packing up and finalising homework; and for outside the classroom activities such as assemblies, flag raising ceremonies, daily exercises, dancing and gardening.

3.5.2 Interviews

Bassey (1999), contrasting interviews with conversations, states that during an interview: *"The researcher has asked the respondent if he will give some time and reveal some of his thinking, not in an idle chat but in a situation where the researcher will record it, or write it down*" (p. 81). Work by Kvale (1996) reveals the complexity of using interviews as an effective method for data collection, while Yin's (2009) distinction between an

[108] Detailed running records and some video recordings were kept of all formal lessons. The schools were open for a total of 55 days during my visits, on average for 5 hours per day. Thus the total time spent in the schools was approximately 275 hours of which 181 hours were spent observing the 155 'formal lessons' and the remainder of the time spent observing other school activities both inside and outside the classroom.

interviewers' *"mental line of inquiry"* and *"verbal line of inquiry"* (p. 87) provides one way to conceptualise this complexity. On the one hand the interviewer asks the questions and responds to the interviewee, but on the other the interviewer has to keep in mind how an inappropriate response, even a 'yes, go on… ' or an 'aah...', has the potential to change the direction of an interview. Verbal responses are about guiding the interviewee towards the 'mental line of inquiry' which represents the broader intention of the interview. Bourdieu (1999) has described interviewing as a *"craft"* which helps *"... respondents deliver up their truth or, rather, to be delivered of it"* (p. 621). In this study numerous interviews were conducted all with the aim of getting participants to 'deliver up their truth'.

Generally interviews were conducted in English and Lao, and although this slowed down the interviews, it allowed for checking of meaning as they proceeded. As soon as possible after the interview concluded the research assistant and I listened to the tapes together and checked the meaning before transcription in English. During the day, the research assistant interpreted as necessary and translated documents such as the teachers' journals, while in the evenings and on weekends she helped transcribe the taped interviews.

It is important to remember that during the fieldwork the beginning teachers were still quite 'vulnerable' having yet to fully establish themselves with the students, their colleagues and the principal. To ensure that the interviews were confidential it was necessary to find private spaces away from family, staff, or other village members where they could be held. At times this proved difficult especially during the first visits when the extended family often crowded into the living room to listen to conversations and at times even 'participate', unasked, in the interview. Gradually, as our novelty wore off, we were able to find quiet places to conduct interviews with the best time often being over lunch when an empty classroom could be used while children were at home.

Confirmation that trust between the beginning teachers and the research team had been reached was evidenced when beginning teachers started to talk about their own practices in ways which contradicted the messages given by the other teachers. Most teachers presented everything at the school as 'rosy' when quite different messages were being given by the four beginning teachers in the confidence of quiet spaces.

The interviews ranged from 'highly structured' to 'semi-structured' and the choice depended upon who was being interviewed and for what purpose. In Stage 1 I used a 'highly structured' schedule to interview trainee-teachers who I did not know, to find out their attitudes about their course. Later, when the first interviews were conducted in the villages,

they were ‘semi-structured’, tailored to find out what had happened to the beginning teachers between visits, and to clarify issues raised by my ongoing daily observations of their classroom practice. The interview types and contexts are briefly discussed below.

Most of the interviews conducted in Stage 1 were taped. One of the reasons for this was to help trainee-teachers become familiar with the tape recorder so that it could be used during Stage 2. However, if it was stated, or it was otherwise apparent, that a person did not want to be taped, recorders were turned off and notebooks put aside. Although interviews with the cooperating teachers were taped, and this probably had a self-censoring effect as I was unknown to them, it is unlikely that any other information would have been forthcoming even if the interview had not been taped.

When Stage 2 commenced in the villages, most of the interviews with the beginning teachers were taped. By this time they were all-familiar with the research team and were confident to indicate when they wanted the recording stopped. This sometimes occurred when they had given opinions during casual conversations but did not want them recorded. In these situations, as with other community members who were less familiar with the team, opinions were recorded through written notes.

Most of the school staff and community members appeared more comfortable when there was no tape recorder. However, in some instances, irrespective of any note-taking, staff members appeared reluctant to talk too openly. One principal, half-way through an interview conducted early in the year, worried that *“the district education authorities might get angry with me for talking to you so much”*. At this stage he was unsure of my purpose but as the year progressed, he became more accepting of the research and of my commitment to confidentiality.

Records of interactions and daily talk were recorded as journal notes. Informal conversations, particularly those which occurred after lesson observations, and which took place on school verandas, were recorded after the event. Conversations held over lunch or during social events about issues related to the school and teaching were also recorded after the event as journal notes. As Emerson *et al*., (1995) explain, journal notes are *“... both intuitive, reflecting the ethnographer’s changing sense of what might possibly be made interesting or important to future readers, and empathetic, reflecting the ethnographer’s sense of what is interesting and important to the people he is observing*” (p. 10). In other words, these journal notes provided not only a record of what I observed but also of my own interpretations from being immersed in the settings.

(i) Stage 1: Interviews with TTC lecturers

Structured interviews were conducted with seven of the lecturers in the Primary Education Office of the Pakse TTC, several of whom I had worked with previously. A set of 12 questions guided the interviews, then time was provided for lecturers to raise other issues not covered in the interview schedule.[109] All interviews were taped and transcribed.

(ii) Stage 1: Interviews with cooperating teachers during pre-service course practicum

During practicum each trainee teacher was assigned to a cooperating teacher, 20 of whom were interviewed about working with the TTC and supervising trainees. These 'semi-structured' interviews[110] had two purposes: to gain insight into how schools worked with the TTC to provide support and role models for the trainees; and, to gain opinions about how well the trainees were performing. In practice, most of the cooperating teachers appeared reticent to talk openly with an 'outsider' and the interviews provided little in-depth information as to the trainees' performance. However, information given about the school-college relationship was useful and was checked against reports from TTC lecturers who were asked the same questions.

(iii) Stage 1: Interviews with trainee-teachers immediately after practicum

The purpose of the interviews was to elicit from the 20 trainee-teachers their experiences of practicum and the extent to which they found it of value. The interviews, held within a week of completing the practicum, were guided by a set of 33 focus questions[111] and were individually customized by reference back to the journals which the trainees had been asked to complete during practicum. In these journals the trainees[112] reflected over the six-week practicum on four questions[113] set by the researcher. Informal discussions had earlier been held with the trainees during practicum after they had been videoed delivering a lesson.

(iv) Stage 1: Interviews with trainee-teachers prior to graduation

The purpose of these interviews was to find out the trainee-teachers' general perceptions about their pre-service course as well as their expectations about future work as teachers. A schedule of 25 questions guided the interviews[114] and after their conclusion four trainees were invited by the research team to participate in Stage 2 of the study.

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109 See Appendix 8 for the interview schedule used with TTC lecturers.
110 See Appendix 9 for the interview schedule used with practicum cooperating teachers.
111 See Appendix 10 for an example of the interview questions addressed to trainee teachers immediately after practicum.
112 16 out of the 20 trainees completed practicum journals as asked.
113 See Appendix 11 for the practicum journal questions.
114 See Appendix 12 for the interview schedule used with trainee teachers at the end of their course.

(v) Stage 2: Interviews and conversations in the villages with the beginning teachers

On average, three 'semi-structured' interviews, typically lasting about 45 minutes, were held with the beginning teacher during each week-long visit. About two thirds of these were taped; the rest, at the interviewees request, were recorded in note form only. Interviews were spaced out across the week and were in addition to the informal conversations held with the teacher every day, and recorded in journal notes. A total of approximately 35.5 hours of taped interviews and 16.5 hours of un-taped interviews were held with the beginning teachers (see Table 3.5 below). The first interviews each week were open-ended and focused on the content raised in the journals and photographs, while the following interviews revolved around the daily observations of classroom life. The final interview for the week focused on the teacher's reflections on their teaching problems, the support they were receiving and how they were coping.

(vi) Stage 2: Interviews and conversations in the villages with other significant persons

Across the four villages a total of 58 'other significant persons' were interviewed. A total of 43 hours of interviews were conducted of which 5 hours were taped and 38 hours un-taped. Each of the staff members were formally interviewed while the principal in each school was formally interviewed during the first and last visits. Village Committee heads and other persons who had dealings with the school were interviewed, sometimes in pairs or in small groups. Many informal conversations were also held and records kept in journal notes.

Table 3.5: Number and duration of semi-structured interviews conducted in Stage 2

Interviewees	**Taped Interviews**		**Un-taped Interviews**		**Total Interviews**	
	Number	Duration (hours)	Number	Duration (hours)	Number	Duration (hours)
Four beginning teachers	47	35.5	22	16.5	69	52.0
Other significant persons	6	5.1	46	38.4	52	43.5
Total	**53**	**40.6**	**68**	**54.9**	**121**	**95.5**

Table 3.6: Number of other significant persons interviewed in each village in Stage 2

Interviewees	Number of persons formally interviewed in each village				
	Sukumnoyi	**Nongsavanh**	**Nakasan**	**Salai**	**Total**
School principal	1	1	1	1	4
Other school staff member	3	9	4	6	22
Village head	1	1	1	1	4
Village Committee members	5	4	3	2	14
Parent of beginning teacher	1	2	2	1	6
DEB officials	2	3	2	1	8
Total	**13**	**20**	**13**	**12**	**58**

3.5.3 Surveys

(i) Stage 1: Surveys at the TTC

The primary aim of Stage 1 was to select four trainees to 'follow' over their first year as beginning teachers. Survey 1 was used as an initial device to build up contextual knowledge about potential participants. Out of a total enrolment of 69 students in the 11+1 course, surveys[115] were given to 40 trainees, primarily to those who had received government scholarships, as they were the ones most likely to acquire work at the end of the year as beginning teachers. I also sought to identify trainees who actually wanted to become teachers and included questions about their motivation for enrolling in the course. Other questions explored their teaching interests and their expectations about work as primary teachers. The responses to the surveys helped formulate the content of the focus group discussions. After practicum, a second survey (Survey 2) was administered to the same 40 trainees who completed the first survey. Its purpose was to collect data about trainees' practicum experiences and then to draw upon the responses to identify further issues to discuss with 20 of the trainees during interviews. The fact that there was a 100% response to both Survey 1 and Survey 2 by the same 40 trainees says almost as much about the trainees and their deference to perceived authority (myself as researcher), as do their answers to the surveys.

[115] See Appendix 13 for Survey 1 schedule.

3.5.4 Focus groups

(i) Stage 1: Focus groups in the TTC

After Survey 1 was returned, the same 40 trainees who took part in the survey all agreed to participate in focus group discussions. Six focus groups, each with 6 or 7 trainees, were organised, and the key issues for discussion were drawn from the surveys.[116] The discussions were facilitated by the research assistant while I listened and occasionally responded. None of the trainee-teachers had previously spoken directly, or through an interpreter, to a native English speaker. I was thus able to see who was confident to give their opinions and talk. After the group discussions 20 trainees were selected as those who would be individually interviewed and observed and videoed while teaching on practicum.

3.5.5 Self-reflective records

While there are concerns that the use of journals in ethnographic research can "*... lead to very general accounts or to de-contextualised accounts of 'critical incidents'* " (Emerson *et al*., 1995, p. xv), their purpose in this study was to recall experiences and stimulate discussion during interviews.

(i) Stage 1: Journals kept by the trainee-teachers

Prior to the commencement of practicum, each of the twenty trainee-teachers were asked to complete weekly journal entries which were structured around four questions (see Appendix 11). The trainees' written responses were drawn upon to stimulate reflection of their practicum experiences during interviews which were held after practicum.

(ii) Stage 2: Journals and photographic records kept by the beginning teachers

At the start of the academic year, the four beginning teachers were asked to maintain a journal and to record teaching highlights with a camera. The journals were structured around four questions with a fifth added after the first week-long visit: (i) *What things have surprised you? (ii) What have been your achievements? (iii) What have been your difficulties? (iv) Has anyone helped you? (v) Have you changed your teaching since my last visit, and if so, how?* The four teachers were also each given a digital camera and asked to record events and activities which happened in their daily working lives.

The journals and photographic records were used during the first formal interview held in the week-long visits in order to stimulate talk about the teaching they had done since my last visit. Some of the teachers completed more journal entries and took more photographs

[116] See Appendix 14 for the questions which guided the trainee-teacher focus group discussions.

than others (see Table 3.7 below); however, there was always enough to use as a basis for discussion and to help me reconnect with each teacher after several weeks away. Even the photographs which were not about teaching provided a chance to catch up with village life as they were often of social events such as weddings and religious festivals. Of the total of 443 photographs, more than 50% were taken of life outside of the schools.

Journal entries were generally terse and during the later visits, the beginning teachers were asked to comment on this. Explanations such as, *"I didn't have time to write more"* were common and typified the teachers' general belief that they lacked time to do 'school work'. They also talked about how they did not complete the journals each week but did so usually just before my scheduled visits. As journal writing was new to them I believe that they found the task difficult and with little time available, wrote only enough to satisfy my requests. However, one of the teachers indicated that the journals were effectively 'publicly made' comments compared to the private interviews, and this may have limited not only how much was written but also what they mentioned: *"I thought the other staff might ask to read what I had written so I just wrote a bit and then took my journal home".* The teachers also appeared to record positive events rather than difficulties. Overall there were many more weeks when 'no difficulties' were recorded than 'no achievements'. However, even considering these limitations the journals still served their intended purpose - as useful prompts for the interviews during the observational site visits.

Table 3.7: Journal entries made and photographs taken by beginning teachers

Beginning teacher	Number of weekly journal entries	Number of photographs taken
Bounyang	29	129
Tiputai	24	157
Khamxing	28	77
Seng	22	80
Total	**103**	**443**

3.5.6 Document analysis

(i) Stage 1: Analysis of pre-service course materials

During the time at the TTC, the course textbooks and resource materials such as handouts and readings, were examined. The main documents referred to were the 11+1 Course Outline (MoE, 1996) and the Practicum Guidebook (Pakse TTC, 2008). Through

these documents I learnt about the pre-service course content and the structure and aims of the six-week practicum organised at local urban primary schools.

(ii) Stage 2: Analysis of school level and MoE materials

During Stage 2 of the research, textbooks and teachers' guides used in the schools were examined, along with administrative forms and documents. MoE documents outlining the criteria for eligibility for teaching competencies (MoE, 2007a), teacher awards (MoE, 2008b), and 'schools of quality' standards (MoE, 2010a) were also reviewed.

3.6 Data Analysis

The amount of data generated through this longitudinal study was substantial. Patton's warning (2002), that: *"The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of the massive amounts of data"* (p. 432) soon became all too clear as I set about the task of *"reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal"* (*ibid.*). While Fetterman (1989) describes data reduction as *"winnowing",* others (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006) stress the instrumental role of the researcher in the selection and rejection of data.

In Stage 1, data analysis was generally undertaken concurrently with data collection as much of the information was necessary to feed into the next phase of the process leading to the selection of the four beginning teachers who would be the participants in the study. The analysed data was also used to build contextual knowledge for Stage 2. During Stage 2 the chosen methodologies of ethnography and case study largely determined the form of the data analysis. Emerson *et al.,* (1995) assert: "*Analysis of ethnographic data begins with concepts that are grounded in and reflect intimate familiarity with the setting or events under study ... the ethnographer seeks to generate as many ideas, issues, topics and themes as possible*" (p. 166). In order to do this, reflective notes were made in the field to accompany the data collected through observations, interviews and documents.

Although this study did not seek to construct theory, the analysis of the ethnographic case study data was undertaken using several 'grounded theory' techniques – development of descriptive and analytical codes; a constant comparison of the codes; analysis to the point of data 'saturation'; memo-making about interpretations; and, reference to the literature after analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). While grounded theory is more generally used to develop substantive, and in some cases, formal theory, Strauss and Corbin (1998), acknowledge the

applicability of some procedures of grounded theory for other purposes: *"Some will use our techniques ... for the purpose of doing very useful description"* (p. 9). Merriam (2009) also explains how grounded theory procedures, such as the constant comparison method, have been *"...widely used throughout qualitative research without building a grounded theory"* (p. 175).

During Stage 2, the data analysis occurred in the weeks following each month of site visits to the four village schools, through a six step process: (i) the coding of observations, journal notes and interview transcripts; (ii) the development of analytical coding; (iii) triangulation of the data; (iv) a within-case analysis; (v) an across-case analysis; and, (vi) a return to the literature. These processes are each discussed below.

3.6.1 Coding of observations, journal notes and transcripts of interviews

The weeks when I was not in the village schools were used for data analysis.[117] The data collected in each school was first coded and then the codes grouped into categories. After the introductory visits the descriptive codes centred on 'communication' and 'village life'. For subsequent visits the scheme was expanded to include codes grouped into the categories of 'classroom practices', 'administration' 'achievements' 'difficulties, 'support' and 'advice'.[118] Although analysis was ongoing throughout the year, a final check was made at the end of Stage 2 which involved re-reading all the data gathered to that time. Codes were compared and checked to ensure consistency. When I found I was unable to code the data in any new ways, the point which Glaser and Strauss (1967) define as "*saturation*", I ceased the analysis.

3.6.2 The development of analytical coding

Once the descriptive codes had been grouped, the categories were analysed to find their *"properties"* and *"dimensions"* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 116-117). This developed into a process of analytical coding described by Richards (2005) as *"coding which comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning"* (p. 94). The challenge at this stage was to *"construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across [the] data*" (Merriam 2009, p. 181). For example the category of 'support' was probed and coded again to find its 'properties' and 'dimensions'. This probing provided an understanding of the types of support being given to the beginning teachers (economic, moral, pedagogical); the motives and reasons why support was given; the people involved in providing support; the

117 See Appendix 4 for the schedule of school visits.
118 See Appendix 15 for an example of the categories and codes used for interviews and observations.

frequency of the support; and the effects of this support. It was at this point that glimmerings of a picture started to emerge from the data.

Reflections in the form of memos were written during data collection and data analysis. As data were coded, and considered, memos were written to make connections between the categories as well as to pose questions for future exploration. As Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) note: *"Memos bring analytic focus to data collection and to the researcher's ideas"* (p. 167).

At the end of the data analysis seven broad categories subsumed many of the others and became the headings for the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6: the contextual pressures on the beginning teachers; the provision of support and advice; the demands of administration; traditional teaching practices; attempts at using learner-centred methods; the development of strategies to help students learn; and, their professional needs.

3.6.3 Triangulation

An important strategy for the research was to draw on multiple sources and types of data. While this technique is traditionally used to confirm that data is valid and reliable (Merriam, 2009), in this study the interlocking nature of observations, conversations and interviews also permitted an exploration of any inconsistencies in the data derived from different sources. The iterative process of moving back and forth between data types presented an opportunity to examine why the observed practices were not always consistent with the emic perspectives provided through the interviews, and why my own perceptions were not always consistent with those provided by the participants. The result is an increased understanding of the various perspectives contained in this study and the complexity of the situations.[119]

3.6.4 Within-case analysis

The use of matrices, advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006), proved to be a valuable way of organising data about each case, and subsequently across cases. They were used over the course of the year and were particularly useful for mapping the changing nature of each teacher's practice and opinions.[120] Elaborated case descriptions were written for each of the four beginning teachers which

[119] See Appendix 16 for an example of a transcription of an interview which highlights how other data was drawn upon.
[120] See Appendix 17 for an example of a matrix created on the topic of 'Assistance From Others' using the comments made by one of the teachers across four visits.

helped me to develop an intimate knowledge of each setting. As Eisenhardt (2002) acknowledges, *"This process allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before investigators push to generalise patterns across each cases"* (p. 18). In Appendix 1 four case records are presented so that a representation of the world which the researcher has experienced is constructed for those *"...who have no independent access to the reality"* (Emerson *et al.,* 1995, p. 214).

3.6.5 Across-case analysis

Immediately following the first visits to the four teachers, a systematic comparison of the four cases commenced. What was observed at one site suggested questions to be asked at the other sites. At the end of the fieldwork, once individual case records had been constructed, a formal process of comparing and contrasting the data commenced. Having an intimate knowledge of each case provided the foundation for being able to make comparisons across the broad themes of 'school contexts' and 'teaching practices'. For the latter theme, specific teaching strategies were selected from the descriptive codes which emerged from the analysis of the 155 formally observed lessons. After quantification an across-case analysis was drawn from the individual case records to describe the four teachers' common, as well as idiosyncratic attitudes, towards the sub-themes of 'teaching difficulties', 'teaching achievements' and 'support'. Thus, both quantified descriptions of classroom teaching behaviours as well as the qualitative data from journal notes and interviews are used to give a comparative picture of the beginning teachers' experiences.

3.6.6 Return to the literature

Initial reading provided sensitisation to areas relevant to the research questions such as: problems experienced by beginning teachers (Lacey, 1977; Veenman, 1984; Huberman, 1989); pre-service teacher education (Kennedy 1999; Loughran, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) situated learning and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998); and the formulation of professional development programs (Guskey, 1995; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Fullan, 2007). However, this analysis is based primarily on an inductive approach which draws on the codes and categories constructed from the data. With regard to the role which literature and theory can play in the analytical process, Glaser and Strauss (1967), in their early formulations of grounded theory, advised that *"... similarities and convergences with the literature can be established after the analytic core of categories has emerged"* (p. 37). On the other hand Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) acknowledge that literature can be drawn upon at any stage of the analysis: *"Theory*

can breathe through ethnographic and grounded theory research and animate it ... we can give old theories new life by comparing our fresh analyses with them" (p. 169).

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Since the advent of post-positivist research, it has been argued that measures of validity and reliability are inappropriate ways of assessing qualitative studies in the interpretative paradigm (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2009). When Lincoln and Guba (1986) reconceptualised the way of judging qualitative studies, they developed criteria of *"credibility", "transferability", "dependability"* and *"confirmability",*[121] and argued that these constitute an over-arching notion of "*trustworthiness"* (p. 77). In this study the four 'trustworthiness' criteria guided its design and implementation as I asked myself the central question: *"Are the findings sufficiently authentic ... that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?"* (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205)

While an ethnographic case study does not aim for generalisation across wider populations, the value of the case and its presentations is that it allows the readers to compare their 'situations' with what has been found. Stake (2005) argues that the value of providing case records is *"... not to represent the world, but to represent the case"* (p. 460). By looking in-depth at how four beginning teachers in typical rural schools in Laos navigated their first year of professional practice, those responsible for educational reform may gain ideas for the revitalisation of teacher education and the provision of support for young teachers. As Merriam (2009) concludes: *"The person who reads the study decides whether the findings can apply to his or her particular situation"* (p. 226).

3.7.1 Measures for ensuring 'trustworthiness'

Several techniques have been utilised in this study to ensure the validity and reliability of its findings. These were drawn from a review of strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1986), Neuman (2006), Merriam (2009), and Creswell (2009), with the addition of 'data logging' from Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006) and 'translation checking' from Bragason (1997). Kvale (1996) argues that measures are required from the first stages of the research design through to the final stage of reporting to see that results are *"trustworthy"* and that *"... qualitative research can, in principle, lead to valid scientific knowledge"* (p. 238). The nine strategies employed in this study were: (i) prolonged time in

[121] Each of the criteria has its parallel in quantitative research: credibility and 'internal validity', transferability and 'external validity', dependability and 'reliability', confirmability and 'objectivity'.

the field; (ii) thick descriptive data; (iii) systematic data recording; (iv) maintenance of a data trail; (v) cross-checking data sources; (vi) consideration of bias; (vii) participant validation;[122] (viii) peer review; and, (ix) checking the translations. Each of these is addressed below and a summary provided at the end of the section showing how each strategy contributed to 'trustworthiness'.

(i) Prolonged time in the field

This is a longitudinal study with active fieldwork extending over 18 months. During Stage 1, five months were spent at the TTC gaining contextual knowledge about the students and their course. In Stage 2, regular visits were made to the four villages across nine months. In all 18 weeks were spent living in the villages. In between the week-long visits, communication was maintained through regular phone calls conducted by the research assistant to find out how things were going and if the teachers were still there.[123] Developing rapport was built over time. As the beginning teachers began to trust us I was able to discuss whether they changed their normal teaching practice whenever I arrived. By the end of the year, they were all confiding in me sufficiently to talk about things that they did differently when I was not present.

(ii) Thick descriptive data

All ethnographic researchers strive towards providing description which allows the reader 'to experience the situation vicariously'. To enhance the validity of the research Adler and Adler (1994) call for *"verisimilitude*" (p. 381) in reporting and Maxwell (2002) for *"factual accuracy"* (p. 45) in the use of description. To pursue accuracy in the descriptions in this study I shared my writings and elaborated case studies with my research assistant to see if they reflected what a Lao person, an 'insider' to the culture, observed. However, ultimately it is my description as an 'outsider' on which this study rests.

(iii) Systematic data recording

All records of interviews, whether taped or written notes (see Tables 3.5 and 3.6), were transcribed and logged. I heeded the warning by Lofland *et al.,* (2006) that: *"The failure to engage in tenacious data logging, then, throws the entire research process into jeopardy"* (p. 82). After the first few days of fieldwork the systematic recording, transcribing and logging of

[122] Also referred to as 'member checking' and 'respondent validation' (Bryman, 2008).

[123] On two occasions I heard how beginning teachers in the province had left their jobs due to the difficulties they encountered such as no support from the local village and no payment. One teacher turned up singing in a night club, the other went off to work for an uncle trading at the Vietnamese border.

data was given the highest priority. The subsequent ease of retrieval of data greatly assisted with coding and analysis.

(iv) Maintenance of a data trail

The data included recorded interviews, journal notes, participants' journal records, photographs and video recordings. Recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, usually the same evening. The teachers' journals were translated and typed as Word documents and along with all journal notes kept on a laptop computer. Documents were filed under site names and visit number. Consideration was given to using Nvivo[124] for data management but with only four cases I decided that the manual retrieval of data would be sufficient. The constant reading and re-reading of the texts allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of each case. With careful labelling of documents and with the creation of matrices, I was able to quickly locate quotations and observations based on location and date.

(v) Cross-checking data sources

Although 'triangulation' has been discussed earlier in Section 3.6.3, it is mentioned again because of its importance to the 'trustworthiness' of the research. Fetterman (1989) for example, emphasises that triangulation *"... is at the heart of ethnographic validity"* (p. 89). The use of multiple data sources provided not only the opportunity to confirm findings but also the possibility of understanding the complexity of phenomena when matches did not occur between two or more data sources such as journals, photographic records, observational notes or interviews. In particular, the use of both observation and interviews helped validate the data on which the findings are based.

The problems, that can arise when participants self-report particularly to strangers, were avoided by supplementing report-type data (journals and interviews) with extensive observations. Becker and Geer (1970) extol the virtues of using field observations as one of the multiple data sources and assert that, *"... participant observation makes it possible to check description against fact and, noting discrepancies, become aware of systematic distortions made by the person under study"* (p. 139). In this study, as trust developed, these 'distortions' provided opportunities for further discussion with the participants. For example, when I raised the issue with one teacher of how she had reported in her journal that she no longer used group work but that I often observed her doing so, she explained how she used it, but only when I was present as she knew her students *"... would not be quite so difficult to*

[124] Nvivo is a software package widely used in the social sciences for data management and analysis.

manage with a 'falang' present". Such opportunities to question teachers' practices provided rich data.

(vi) *Consideration of bias*

A key consideration is that of bias in research. Neuman (2006) states *"When field researchers become immersed in the world of the less powerful ... they may be accused of bias because they give a voice to parts of society that are not otherwise heard"* (p. 413). While it was the intent of this research to explore the professional worlds of the beginning teachers from their perspectives, it was also important to examine the data and to question the consistency of their perspectives presented in the observations and interviews. For example, when the beginning teachers reported a general lack of support, which was contradicted by the stories told by their principals, I compared both accounts with my own observations. Following on from this, I held confidential discussions with my research assistant about possible cultural explanations for the seemingly contradictory statements. Thus the approach of *"looking beyond surface appearances"* (*ibid*., p. 446) proved to be central to ensuring the reliability of the findings. This constant probing into appearances accords with Flyvbjerg's (2001) contention that: *"The case study contains no greater bias towards verification ... than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias towards falsification of preconceived notions than towards verification"* (p. 84).

(vii) *Participant validation*

During the week-long visits I took my notes back to the beginning teachers to check that I had accurately recorded what they had earlier shared with the research team. The following year after the fieldwork was completed, I returned to meet with each of the four teachers individually and reported my preliminary findings to them. In order to encourage discussion and diminish any reluctance to talk should there be disagreement over the interpretations I had put upon their information, I did not tape these interviews and instead made notes. For three of the teachers, although there were nervous glances as some of the findings were read out, there was confirmation that what I had reported was accurate. However, the fourth teacher appeared far more unsure and uneasy when listening to my findings related to the practices of reporting test results, making lesson plans, and minding other teachers' classes. He asked again who would hear my accounts of his work and only after my assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, did he agree that they were true reflections of what had occurred.

After these interviews, the research assistant and I concluded that each of the teachers, to varying degrees, were cautious about being identified with the findings. While the two

female teachers who had already obtained permanency displayed less anxiety, the two male teachers who were still 'volunteers' and therefore vulnerable, were far more nervous.

(viii) Peer review

Aspects of this study have been presented at three RMIT student research conferences.[125] More importantly the findings have been extensively examined by and discussed with the Lao research assistant in her dual roles as a member of the research team and as an experienced TTC lecturer. Extremely valuable discussions were also held with a colleague from the TTC who had worked as a teacher trainer for over 25 years. While the anonymity of the beginning teachers was maintained, the findings were discussed in detail. From his extensive time spent in Lao rural schools he was able to corroborate that the findings rang true to his own observations and experiences.

(ix) Checking the translations

In order to check the quality of the translation, Bragason (1997) recommends having the text independently assessed by someone who knows the field and subject of the research. Consequently, after the first taped interviews had been recorded in the TTC and translated by the research assistant, I had several of them checked by a trusted Lao colleague (with any material that might identify the interviewee deleted), who confirmed the accuracy of the translation. As the research assistant and I had previously worked together for several years we were familiar with each others' working habits and she was confident to stop and ask for clarification when experiencing difficulties. At these times we would talk together about how best to translate the meanings, particularly the *in vivo* meanings used by the participants.

(x) Summary

Following Lincoln & Guba (1986), Table 3.8 below summarises the contributions each of the nine strategies used in the research made towards creating findings that are credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable, that is to say, towards a 'trustworthy' study.

[125] Conferences held at RMIT University in Melbourne in November 2008, June 2011 and November 2012.

Table 3.8: Strategies and criteria used to ensure 'trustworthiness'

Strategies for ensuring 'trustworthiness'		Criteria for judging 'trustworthiness'			
		Credible	**Transferable**	**Dependable**	**Confirmable**
1	Prolonged time in the field	✓		✓	
2	Thick descriptive data		✓		
3	Systematic data recording		✓	✓	✓
4	Maintenance of a data trail			✓	✓
5	Cross-checking data sources	✓		✓	✓
6	Consideration of bias	✓		✓	✓
7	Participant validation	✓		✓	✓
8	Peer review	✓			
9	Checking the translations	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE: ✓ = strategy contributes to relevant criteria for 'trustworthiness'

3.8 Conclusion

This study attempts to capture the 'essence' of what it is like to be a beginning teacher starting out in a rural village primary school in Laos. In this chapter the paradigm and methodology which framed the research were first discussed. Ethical issues were then considered after which the methods used for data collection, and the analytic techniques utilised, were presented. Finally the measures taken to ensure that the findings are 'trustworthy' were explained.

The next chapter takes the reader into the world of the trainee-teachers and describes their pre-service program experiences. It is followed by two chapters that describe the professional experiences of the four beginning teachers over the course of their first year of teaching.

CHAPTER 4. TRAINEE-TEACHERS: STUDYING AT COLLEGE

> *It is impossible to teach people how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest they 'do the opposite' of what they have observed in the classroom.*
>
> Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 308

4.0 Introduction

The central issue of this research is how beginning teachers develop their professional practice. Of related interest is the extent to which pre-service training is of use when trainee-teachers enter the workforce. Rather than relying on the *post hoc* reporting of teachers about their training, this study investigates the experiences of trainee-teachers *in situ* during their pre-service program. Four graduates from the program were then 'followed' during their first year of teaching and their professional experiences examined.

This chapter draws upon information collected from trainee-teachers while they were studying for a one-year diploma at the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC) during the 2008/2009 academic year. Through the use of surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, observations, and document analysis[126] the first research question is addressed:

- *What expectations do trainee-teachers have about the roles they will perform and the responsibilities they will have as beginning teachers?*

Exploring the backgrounds of trainee-teachers and the types of experiences they had during their pre-service program assists with understanding whether the four beginning teachers in the study were equipped to deal with the conditions they encountered upon starting work. The chapter is consequently organised around four topics: (i) the profiles of trainee-teachers; (ii) the teacher education program; (iii) the professional experiences of trainee-teachers during their course; and, (iv) the expectations of trainee-teachers towards teaching.

4.1 Profiles of Trainee-Teachers

4.1.1 Backgrounds

Of the 69 trainee-teachers enrolled in the one-year diploma at the Pakse TTC in 2008/2009 (the so-called 11+1 program), 63 had just graduated from high school. Thus, only six years previously, most trainees had been in primary school. Of these, 60 reported that their parents were farmers or were government employees who supplemented their income with

[126] Details of the research tools used are given in Table 3.3.

agricultural work. Fifty-nine of the trainees stated that they spoke Lao at home while ten were from an ethnic minority and spoke Lao as a second language.[127] Sixty-one of the trainees were from Champasak Province where the TTC is located and eight came from one of the other southern provinces which border Champasak - Salavanh, Attapeu or Sekong (see Map 2).

4.1.2 Memories of school

Mid-way through their training course the 69 trainee-teachers in the cohort were invited to participate in a survey. As part of the survey the 40 respondents wrote about their own schooling with 22 (55%) mentioning that in primary school there were rarely enough textbooks to go around and that they 'always' or 'nearly always' had to share books with others. When asked to recall the teaching they experienced in school, 33 (83%) described elements of traditional 'chalk-and-talk' classrooms with the teacher typically writing up the content of the textbook lesson onto the board, asking a few questions and then getting the students to copy the blackboard work into their books. Thirty of the trainees (75%) reported that their teachers rarely, if ever, used teaching aids to help explain the lessons, while three of the trainees had no recollection of ever having participated in group work. As these responses are only the memories of young people of events in their childhood, no great weight is put upon them, suffice to say that few of the trainees, either through the survey or during subsequent focus group discussions, gave any indication of having ever been exposed to anything akin to modern teaching methods. Although the trainees entered primary school after learner-centred methodology was introduced into the TTCs in the mid-1990s, it appears that few of the innovative practices being advocated in the Pakse TTC made their way into the everyday pedagogical practices of rural classrooms in Champasak Province to the extent that they created a lasting impression upon the students.

4.1.3 Reasons for becoming a teacher

Responses to the question in the first survey, "*Why did you decide to become a teacher?"* varied from "*having someone in the family who had also been a teacher*" (10%) and *"doing what my parents wanted"* (33%), *to* "*wanting to help develop the country*" (40%). Of the 10 trainees who said that they liked the job, half also said they liked the idea of helping children, with two of them saying it had been their *"childhood dream"*.

[127] See Chapter 1, Footnote 9 for comment on the four major ethno-linguistic families in Laos.

The 40 respondents to the survey all reported (100%) that their parents had supported their choice to become a teacher, while 11 (28%) reported that their parents not only agreed with the decision but had made it for them, usually for reasons of finance and job security. Although many of the trainee-teachers were on scholarships, for some families there were still financial hardships. One student recalled:

> *Even though I had a scholarship my family still could not afford the extra costs for me to undertake study and I had to wait a year before enrolling. First we had to save the money to pay for some new clothes and extra food that the scholarship didn't cover.*
>
> *(*Focus Group 4)

As well as wanting to help develop *"the country",* 18 of the respondents (48%) spoke more specifically of wanting to help *"develop my village".* When asked to expand upon this most spoke about the general lack of teachers. One trainee reported: *"In my village there are not enough teachers. I have seen one teacher teaching four classes"* (Focus Group 6). Another reported: *"There was only one qualified teacher at my school. None of the others had been to the TTC"* (Focus Group 5). Several trainees reported that their villages relied on teachers from outside the area and their aim was to help their village have its own teachers:

> *Teachers in my village are from other villages so often they do not stay for long – sometimes just three months, sometimes one year and then another person comes. This is why I want to become a teacher. If I pass this course then I will be the first person from my village to be a teacher.*
>
> (Focus Group 1)

4.2 The Teacher Education Program[128]

The Pakse TTC was established in 1962 and initially offered a two-year course for students who had graduated from 6 years of formal schooling (6+2 program). In 1986, as the level of education rose throughout the country, this was extended by a year and those who had completed 8 years of formal schooling now studied in the 8+3 program. Then in 1993, when 11 years of primary and high school education became the national standard, the 8+3 course was phased out in most areas and a new 1-year diploma course, the 11+1 program, was introduced.

For 15 consecutive academic years the 11+1 course was delivered at the Pakse TTC before being offered for the last time in 2008-2009.[129] During those years 1,922 trainees

[128] See also the discussion in Section 1.1.5 on TTC course offerings, and Appendix 2 for further details.

graduated from the course many of whom went on to teach in schools across Champasak Province.[130] The four beginning teachers had therefore received similar training to that received by the cooperating teachers they met on practicum, and by their new colleagues in the schools.

4.2.1 The 11+1 program

The 11+1 program was taught over two semesters. Semester 1 was 16 weeks long made up of 15 weeks of course-work and a week of observational visits in schools. Semester 2 was also 16 weeks long made up of 8 weeks of course-work, 6 weeks of practicum, and a two-week post-practicum meeting.

The program had three main components: course-work, practicum and post-practicum meetings. The course-work component was organised into the subjects shown in Table 4.1 below with the 30 hours of course-work per week being nominal only. During the six months spent at the college classes were often cut short or cancelled to accommodate other college activities such as sports days or official ceremonies. However, with only a few exceptions, the lecturing staff slavishly followed the lesson prescriptions set out in the curriculum documents and rarely deviated from them. In addition to the regular course-work, from time-to-time there were opportunities for trainees to take part in short courses or workshops funded and delivered by external aid agencies.

The practicum component of the program was based in local primary schools. It involved a one-week school observation visit in Semester 1 and a six-week block spent in schools in Semester 2. The six-week block was structured into an initial week of classroom observations followed by five weeks of observations and teaching practice. Each week the trainee was assigned to a different 'cooperating' teacher and taught or observed in that person's class for a week so that by the end of the practicum the trainee had worked in the five grade levels in the school. This at least was the intent, but as discussed below (Section 4.3.2), for over half of the trainees the practicum did not follow this pattern. Tasks were also set by the lecturers that the trainees were expected to complete during the practicum period and these were outlined in the Practicum Handbook (Pakse TTC, 2008).

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[129] In June 2009, the first cohort of high school students graduated from 12 years of formal school education and a newly, designed, two-year diploma, the 12+2 program, commenced in each of the eight TEIs replacing the 11+1 program. In June 2010, to coincide with the curriculum changes, the Pakse TTC formed a new Pre-School Department alongside its Primary Department. Both departments began offering 2-year diploma programs to students with 12 years of high school education.

[130] In the 2008-2009 academic year there were 450 'complete' primary schools offering Grades 1-5 and 3,020 primary school teachers in Champasak province (MoE, 2009b).

The third component of the program was made up of two weeks of post-practicum meetings. The meetings were designed as an opportunity for trainees to report on their practicum experience to peers and lecturers, and provided a chance for lecturers to respond to any problems which trainees had encountered during practicum.

Table 4.1: 11+1 program subjects

Semester 1 (16 weeks)	**Hours per week**	**Semester 2** (16 weeks)	**Hours per week**
15 weeks course-work 1 week of school visits		**8 weeks course-work 6 weeks practicum 2 weeks post-practicum meetings**	
1. Child Psychology and Development	3	1. Lao Culture	2
2. Primary Teaching Method 1	4	2. Primary Teaching Method 2	4
3. Mathematics Teaching Method 1	6	3. Mathematics Teaching Method 2	6
4. Lao Language Teaching Method 1	6	4. Lao Language Teaching Method 2	6
5. World Around Us Teaching Method 1	3	5. World Around Teaching Method 2	4
6. Fine Arts and Handicraft Method 1	2	6. Fine Arts and Handicraft Method 2	2
7. Music and Dance Teaching Method 1	2	7. Music and Dance Teaching Method 2	2
8. Technology Method	2	8. English	2
9. Physical Education Method	2	9. Politics	2
Total hours of course-work per week	**30**	**Total hours of course-work per week**	**30**

NOTE: 1. Due to 'special circumstances' the 2008-2009 practicum was shortened to six weeks.
2. Hours for individual subjects given in Table 4.1 above are subject to some variation.

4.2.2 The staff

The Primary Teaching Program was delivered by six permanent staff members, who shared the Pre-School and Primary Office. Four of them had worked at the TTC since 1984. Several lecturers attached to other departments in the college, were responsible for delivering courses in English, Art, Physical Education, Music and Dance, and Politics. While most lecturers incorporated short talks, whole class questioning and group work with discussion into their lectures, the focus was upon working through the textbook content.

4.3 Professional Experiences of the Trainee-Teachers

This section, on the trainees' experiences of the primary education program, draws on the end-of-course surveys conducted with 40 trainees, and on subsequent 'follow-up' interviews with 20 of them. Observations of lessons delivered by lecturers in the TTC[131] and by trainees on practicum, and an analysis of curriculum documents, are also used.

4.3.1 Course work

By the end of the course, 32 out of 40 trainees (80%) reported through the end-of-course survey that the subjects they found of most value were Child Psychology and Development and the three methodology subjects – Lao Language, Mathematics and the World Around Us (effectively social studies) with the latter being the most useful of all because it: *"taught us about topics which could easily be related to the real lives of our students".* As far as delivery was concerned 36 of the trainees (90%) reported that they liked the way most lecturers gave them the opportunity to discuss topics in class, and how this was different to the teaching approach used in their high school classes which had been dominated by 'teacher-talk'.

In the final interviews with 20 trainees, a more detailed discussion of the merits and deficiencies of the course was possible. Fifteen of the trainees interviewed (75%) spoke of wanting more time spent on teaching techniques with several asking for advice from their lecturers on how to implement learner-centred methods such as group work, incorporating activities into lessons, and increasing student participation. Trainees noted that their textbooks included descriptions of 'modern teaching practices' and these were explained by their lecturers but rarely demonstrated in college time. Nor did the lecturers organise for trainees to observe such teaching in local schools. Eighteen of those interviewed (90%) suggested lecturers should give demonstration lessons using the methods they talked about.

4.3.2 The practicum

According to the practicum guidelines, "*on arrival in a school trainee-teachers should spend the first week undertaking classroom observations before starting to teach*." However, the Head of the Primary Department explained that it was difficult to enforce this requirement for fear that cooperating teachers would be reluctant to accept trainees. In practice, many cooperating teachers appeared to use trainees as 'unofficial relief'. As the cooperating

[131] Seven lecturers were observed delivering a total of 14 lessons.

teachers received no payment for having trainees in their classroom, this was the primary benefit for them. A secondary benefit mentioned by several cooperating teachers was that the school usually kept the teaching aids the trainees made for their lessons such as flashcards, picture cards, and sentence holders.

(i) Concerns with practicum raised by trainee-teachers

Of the 20 trainees interviewed after practicum, 10 had been allowed to observe for the first five days but the other 10 had only limited opportunities. Four trainees reported that they observed for two days before being directed to start teaching, another that he was able to observe for only one day, and another that he observed only one lesson during his entire six-week practicum. In an interview, a cooperating teacher explained what many trainees discovered: *"I like having the trainee-teachers come. It's good because I don't have to teach so much and can just give advice"*.

The lack of opportunity to observe, spoken of by half the trainees on practicum, may also have been due to the belief expressed by several cooperating teachers that "*trainees learn best by teaching themselves*". A further justification was given by one cooperating teacher who said that although he had been teaching for thirty years, he felt "*unable*" to model the teaching techniques which he knew the trainees learnt in the college. He thus felt it was unnecessary to allow time for teachers to observe his "*traditional ways of teaching*".

The lack of opportunity to observe was not the only concern reported by the trainees. On the whole, they were given less time for observation than was stipulated and what they observed was limited or contradicted what was taught at college. Also some cooperating teachers gave a piece of advice but then ignored it themselves in their own teaching. Another concern reported by several trainees was that when they did try to incorporate group work or an activity into their lesson, they were told by the cooperating teachers that the lessons were taking too long. One trainee-teacher spoke of the confusion she felt during practicum:

> *When the teacher looked at my lesson plan she told me to use teaching aids and group work. On two occasions I tried this but she told me to stop – once because the children had become too noisy and the second time because the lesson was taking too long.*

The data in Table 4.2, derived from the end-of-year survey of 40 trainees, shows the number of trainees who observed particular 'learner-centred' methods[132] being used by teachers during practicum. It highlights the fact that the use of these methods by the teachers

[132] The kinds of 'learner-centred' methods which are advocated in Laos, but rarely seen, are outlined in Section 2.1.5.

themselves, such as teaching aids, group work, concrete materials and incorporating games and activities into lessons, was infrequent.

Table 4.2: Number and percentage of a group of 40 trainee-teachers who observed particular learner-centred methods being used by teachers during practicum lessons

Number (%) of trainees who saw types of learner-centred methods being used				
Learner-centred method used	**Never seen used**	**Seen used 1 or 2 times**	**Seen used 3 or more times**	**Total**
Teaching aids	17 (43)%	19 (47%)	4(10%)	40 (100%)
Concrete materials	36 (90%)	4 (10%)	0 (0%)	40 (100%)
Group work	20 (50%)	13 (32%)	7 (18%)	40 (100%)
Games or activities	33 (82%)	7 (18%)	0 (0%)	40 (100%)

Trainees also reported that they were frequently told by their cooperating teachers to avoid any teaching strategies which took too long and to limit the time spent reviewing the previous lesson. The purpose for giving such advice, they were told, was the need to get through the textbook. However, after practicum, many trainees said that they felt confused as on one hand they had been urged by the college lecturers to try these teaching strategies, but when they did, it was not always accepted by their cooperating teachers.

A further concern expressed by 15 (75%) of the trainees in the interviews immediately following practicum, was that the cooperating teachers were often absent from the classroom and provided little pedagogical advice. Only one trainee-teacher reported having a cooperating teacher who was always in the room when she taught, while five other trainees reported that their cooperating teachers were usually at the back of the room even though they mostly "*did other work at the same time*". The 14 other trainees recalled being left alone quite a lot of the time. As one reported:

> *Before we went on practicum I thought we would get more support. I had hoped they would come and observe and give suggestions after they saw me teaching but often they didn't even come into the classroom. Most of the teachers just sat near the rooms chatting with other teachers while I was teaching. They kept an eye on the class but never watched my lessons from the beginning to the end.*

Observations made during the practicum visits when the trainees were videoed, were in accord with many of the comments made by the trainees. Cooperating teachers were often not in the classroom and they provided little feedback. And during the 20 lessons which were videoed the classroom teacher stayed in the room for only half of them.

(ii) Assistance during practicum from other trainees

Nineteen of the trainees interviewed (95%) reported that support from their peers was vital to learning about each class and to completing the practicum assessment requirements, in particular, the requirement to produce lesson plans. The following comment shows how many of the trainees relied on each other:

> *I talked to classmates who had taught the same class the week before so I could find out about the students. I hardly ever asked the cooperating teachers - just the other trainees. I only asked the cooperating teachers for comments after they had watched me teach. It's hard to ask though as we don't know them very well, not like our classmates.*

Observations of the trainees on practicum, showed that they planned the following days' lessons after school, working individually, but often in the same room as other trainees. Here they were observed talking informally to each other about their days' experiences and discussing the classes that they would teach the following week. In this way they found out about where the class was up to in the textbook and about any individual students who had particular needs. Only on rare occasions was a trainee seen talking to a cooperating teacher.

(iii) Learning from the practicum experience

Even though many trainees were disappointed by their practicum experiences, the majority still felt that it was the most useful component of the course. All the trainees spoke of practicum as an opportunity to learn how to plan lessons and to "*stand-up and teach*". This appeared to boost their confidence that they would be able to teach after they graduated. More specifically several of the trainees spoke of working with children:

> *On practicum I learnt to work with children and how it is important not to get angry and to be patient. If we are angry with them they might not come back to school and then they will not learn. We were told this by our lecturers but I could also see it on practicum.*

One of the understandings reached on practicum, that 18 of the 20 trainees interviewed (90%) reported as 'important' or 'very important' was 'getting on with staff members'. One lecturer from the TTC who was also a graduate of the same course explained, *"If the trainee has a good friendship with the teacher then he or she can get a good mark and one way of getting that is to follow the teacher's advice"*. Several of the trainees commented that in order to pass the practicum it was essential to listen to the suggestions of the cooperating teachers and "*help them out*", that is, to take their class without question.

4.3.3 The post-practicum meetings

While nearly all of the 20 trainees interviewed identified practicum as the most valuable component of the course, during the interviews four of the trainees (10%) rated the post-practicum meetings as of equal importance, one describing it as a time when *"we can share and compare our experiences*". However, three of the interviewees explained that their value really depended on which lecturer was running the session. Typically the meetings were scheduled to allow for around 10 groups of between 6 to 8 trainees to make presentations about their practicum assignments, with the six lecturers from the Pre-School and Primary Office taking it in turns to facilitate.

Two of the course lecturers were singled out by trainees as being particularly good facilitators:

> *When (Mr S.) runs the sessions he asks us more questions than the other lecturers do and his suggestions makes us think more. He makes us reflect on our experiences and compare what we see and hear in the schools with what we are told at the College. When he facilitates the sessions, he explains and gives suggestions on how to teach. I feel that I can learn a lot from him.*

From personal observation, one of the younger lecturers also used the sessions as an opportunity to get the trainees' to reflect on their practicum experiences. Students' reports were interspersed with her personal anecdotes as she brought concepts and issues related to teaching to life. In general, there was a big difference in the facilitation styles of the six lecturers. Four of them maintained a 'hands-off' approach and merely summarised what was reported during the group presentations. For these lecturers the post-practicum meetings were for assessment purposes. For the other two they were used as valuable teaching opportunities.

4.4 The Trainee-Teachers' Expectations of Teaching

Through the surveys and in the final interviews conducted in the TTC, three broad topics were explored with the trainee-teachers: (i) In what areas do you feel you need more training? (ii) What makes a 'good' teacher? And the first research question, (iii) What expectations do you have of teaching as a career? Their responses to these and similar questions give a picture of the expectations the trainees held about teaching and their preparedness to take up positions as 'volunteer' teachers, not in 'attractive' urban settings, but in primary schools in rural villages potentially anywhere across Champasak Province.

(i) In what areas do you feel you need more training?

By the end of their course the trainee-teachers had been made well aware that adopting learner-centred methods was one of the key directions espoused in the government's educational policy.[133] However, during the final interviews 18 out of 20 trainees (90%) said that they felt unprepared to use such strategies and felt they needed to learn more about them. As discussed earlier, the trainee-teachers heard about learner-centred methods often enough during their course, but rarely saw them in action.

Twelve trainees (60%) wanted to learn more about multi-grade teaching especially since they believed they had a high chance of being sent to a remote, 'incomplete' school which had such kinds of classes.[134] Most of the trainees interviewed also spoke anxiously about being sent to a one-teacher school where they would be on their own. Several raised the issue of not knowing what kind of support would be available to them from the District Education Bureau (DEB) were this to happen and worried about who might help them learn specific tasks associated with teaching: The village head? The principal in the neighbouring school? Perhaps a friend?

All 20 trainees interviewed said they wanted to learn more about 'administration', a topic that had rarely been touched on in their course. It might have been expected that administration and reporting would be addressed in the practicum – but this never happened *"because we had to teach all day."* As the four trainees who later participated in Stage 2 of the study as beginning teachers were soon to discover, a concern about a lack of knowledge and skills in this area was well founded.

(ii) What makes a 'good' teacher?

At the end of the course, 40 trainee-teachers were asked through a survey to describe the characteristics of a 'good' teacher. The most common response, provided by 32 of the trainees (80%), was that 'good' teachers are those who are *"patient and kind"*. This response rate was slightly higher than that reported for the same question in the first survey, when 28 out of 40 trainees (70%) also extolled the virtues of 'kind' teachers. At interview, one trainee-teacher elaborated on her response, explaining that in rural villages, if teachers were not kind then the students would simply stay at home.

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133 The issue of 'how to adopt a learner-centred approach' was raised in several subjects of the course and was asked as one of the questions in the final exam for the trainees.

134 In 2009, 22% of classrooms in Champasak province were 'multi-grade' in which two or more grades were taught by the same teacher (MoE, 2009b). By 2011-2012 the percentage of multi-grade classrooms in the province had increased to 26.4% while the national average stood at 29.3% (MoES, 2012).

As reported by 30 of the trainees (75%) in the second survey, another characteristic of the 'good' teacher is someone who "*cares for children*". In the words of one trainee, such a teacher *"advises the students on the correct ways to behave both inside and outside the classroom – the teacher is their second mother"*. Since its first use by the Minister of Education in the heady days immediately following the Lao Revolution in 1975, the phrase *"second mother"* is commonly repeated in the official rhetoric to describe the role of the teacher.[135]

A third characteristic spoken of by 10 of the trainees (50%) during the final interviews was that 'good' teachers were those who did not leave the children alone in the room to learn from the textbook and who were *"strict"*. One trainee explained that her views on 'strictness' hardened after her observations on practicum that some cooperating teachers allowed students virtually to do what they liked so long as they were quiet. Another trainee described how she had observed the cooperating teacher setting work on the board and then walking outside leaving her class to work out the problems for themselves. Referring to a mathematics lesson she put forward the view that:

> *Good teachers should give an example first and then let the students try it by themselves, but even so, the teachers need to stay close to the students to help them if they can't do it and then show them how, not just walk outside and chat.*

Another commonly cited characteristic of the 'good' teacher is someone who can explain. While 21 (53%) of the trainees mentioned this during the first survey, the response was significantly higher in the second survey conducted after practicum when 30 trainees (75%) reported how *"good teachers can explain the textbook lessons clearly so students can learn"*.

Considering the importance attributed in the core course subjects to learner-centred methods (questioning, using concrete materials, linking lessons to real life, group work, using games and activities in lessons), it was surprising that the use of these methods were not mentioned more frequently by the trainees as one of the characteristic of a 'good' teacher. During the interviews only three trainees stated that 'good' teachers should use games and activities, three that 'good' teachers should link the lessons to the students' real lives, and one that the teacher should ask the children questions.

[135] Personal communication, August 2009, Senior Official (MoE) during the trainees' graduation ceremony at the Pakse TTC.

(iii) What expectations do you have of teaching as a career?

In the final interviews 20 trainees were asked to consider what they expected would be the most difficult task in their first year out. Ten trainees (50%) suggested that they would find teaching the most difficult with several who reported this saying that the course had been "*too short*", and that after practicum many of their questions about teaching *"remained unanswered"*. One trainee feared he would be assigned to work in a multi-grade class and felt *"overwhelmed by this possibility"*. Another trainee reported not understanding some of the textbook lessons and wondered how he would be able to deliver them, especially if he was asked to teach Grade 5.

In the final interview, a number of trainees spoke of the importance of building good relationships with others (the same issue was also mentioned in interviews during the practicum). Eighteen of the trainees (90%) stated that their preferred location for work would be in their own village because it would be "*easier to ask questions"* if they already knew the other staff and the students' parents. As one trainee teacher explained: "*If I know some of the teachers, it will be much easier*."

Only two trainees reported a preference for teaching in a village away from home in a remote area. They felt that with such a posting they would receive preferential treatment towards securing a permanent position, and therefore a salary and job security. However, trainees who anticipated going to work in unfamiliar villages also emphasised the importance of getting to know their colleagues, and through them, the Village Committee members. They explained that they would find out how to teach by asking questions, and this would only be possible if they first "*established relationships*" with the other staff. One trainee spoke of the importance of this task:

> *One of the most important things for me to do next year will be to build up my relationships with the other teachers so I get the confidence to ask them questions and then I will be able to work with them properly.*

Nineteen of the trainees interviewed (95%) stated that the level they would prefer to teach would be Grade 3 or higher, and no one had any interest in teaching Grade 1. One trainee claimed, "*by Grade 3, the children know how to behave and they already know the basics of reading and mathematics*". The trainees spoke of each grade as an homogenous ability group and none of them appeared to have a realistic appreciation of how diverse the range of abilities could be across an 'average' class.

4.5 Conclusion

The six-month period, from February to August 2009, was spent in the Pakse TTC conducting surveys, talking to staff, interviewing trainees, observing lecturers delivering lessons and watching trainees on practicum take their first hesitant steps in the classroom. It was a time when I was able to see the teacher education program in action and to get to know the trainees as individuals. Later I would ask four of these people to trust me with their confidences. This period proved to be invaluable - it provided me with the background I needed to be able to understand where the beginning teachers had come from in their training, and gave me some insights as to where they might be headed in their work.

All 69 of the trainees in the 2008/2009 11+1 program at the Pakse TTC graduated from their course and left the College seemingly with high aspirations of wanting to be 'good teachers'. Most shared the same priorities, namely: *"to get a teaching position"* and then *"to gain permanency"* and it could be seen during the many interviews conducted, that this second goal was never far from the minds of the four beginning teachers during their first year of teaching. However, as a number of the trainees had already acknowledged during discussions and interviews, their repertoire of 'teaching tools' gained from the course was limited and yet to prove whether it was adequate for tackling the task ahead.

By the end of the pre-service program, the teacher-trainees had shared many experiences and reached a set of mutual understandings derived from them. Foremost amongst these, and understood by all the trainees, was the importance placed in schools on completing the textbook lessons. Towards the end of the year they had observed their lecturers in their own program scurrying to pick up the pace of course delivery to ensure that all lessons were taught. On practicum, many trainees received advice from the cooperating teachers to use the 'traditional' practices of recitation, copying and whole class question and answer to speed up lesson delivery in order to cover the textbook content. Some trainees were also able to observe this advice being put into practice in the classroom.

The lack of congruence between what was discussed in college and what was observed on practicum did little to establish the firm base that the trainees would soon need when, as beginning teachers, they commenced teaching their own class. In the post-practicum meetings, college lecturers had reminded trainees that several of the observed practices such as leaving the students alone in the classroom, making them copy from the board without explaining, and leaving the 'weaker' and 'less-able' children to work things out for

themselves - were unacceptable. However, there were few demonstrations which exemplified correct practices and trainees could only imagine how they might proceed.

This chapter set out to examine the adequacy of the teaching course as a way of preparing young teachers for the realities of the rural primary school classroom in Laos, and in many ways was seen to be wanting. It also set out to enquire into the expectations that trainee-teachers had about the roles they would perform and the responsibilities they would have as beginning teachers. This, in effect was the first research question.

From the final interviews conducted with 20 trainees at the end of the course it was found that most were very enthusiastic about their chosen career with the prospect that it would lead to a permanent government position and a regular salary. For these trainees the aim was not about escaping to the towns but about returning to the countryside, preferably back to the village where they had grown up and where their family still lived. This was especially true for the women in the course. With few exceptions the trainees wanted to teach at Grade 3 or above in the belief that the students would have basic literacy and numeracy by that time. Their job would be to care for the students and encourage them to come to school and little was said about academic achievement. A common portrayal of their role as teacher was one couched in idealistic terms as the *"friend and carer"* and virtually no negative attributions were made about the role of the teacher or the nature of the students. Many of the trainees expressed some concern about the adequacy of their own skills, especially with respect to *"new methodologies"* but there was a general feeling that these deficiencies would disappear over time as they picked things up along the way. However, as far as their overall abilities were concerned, all the trainees interviewed held the view that they would be *"good"* teachers helping the people of their village. Even after their practicum experiences what actually lay ahead was almost certainly not understood and was certainly never mentioned.

At the end of the course, and with a one-year diploma in hand, four of the new graduates were invited to participate in Stage 2 of the research. Each person had done well in the course and had been recommended by their lecturers. They had also been articulate during interviews and focus group discussions, and each had expressed an interest in teaching. They knew that in the next stage the focus would be on observing how they made their way in their schools as beginning teachers, and even if a daunting prospect, all of them agreed to be involved.

Accounts of how each of the four, as beginning teachers, set out on their teaching careers, are provided in Appendix 1 in the form of four case records. An examination of the contextual pressures the four teachers experienced and the extent to which these shaped the teaching practices they adopted, are described and examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5. CONTEXT: VILLAGE AND SCHOOL

> *To understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants.*
>
> Borko, 2004, p. 4

5.0 Introduction

This chapter details the worlds of the beginning teachers by analysing a number of contextual pressures upon them and by considering the impact these have upon determining the types of practices they begin to adopt or adapt as neophytes in the classroom. These pressures originate from a number of sources – from events and activities in the village, from local village authorities, from the bureaucracy of the District Education Bureau (DEB), from the school principal, and from other teachers. They were both direct – an instruction from the principal, or indirect – the example of the teacher next door, but they all played a part in shaping how the teachers (all still in their teens) developed as practitioners.

Due to the delicate nature of some of the issues raised,[136] neither the real names of the teachers nor the real names of the villages where they worked are used. Instead the teachers are referred to as: Mr Bounyang, Sukumnoyi Village, Paksong District; Miss Tiputai, Nongsavanh Village, Sukuma District; Miss Seng, Salai Village, Champasak District; and, Mr Khamxing, Nakasan Village, Bachiang District.[137]

During Stage 2 of the research, when ethnographic data was collected in the four villages, over half of the 36 weeks in the school year were spent visiting schools.[138] Some visits coincided with agricultural events such as planting or harvesting, others with religious or cultural festivals, and still others with times of national celebration. Each visit provided many opportunities for observation and helped me to develop an understanding of school and village life which in turn guided the direction of the interviews I conducted.

The four districts where the teachers were posted vary considerably. Paksong is a coffee growing area on the Bolaven Plateau while Sukuma is a poor rice-growing district on the flood plains of the Mekong. Rice is also grown in neighbouring Champasak but because of the money brought in by visitors to the pre-Angkor religious complex in the district, it is richer than Sukuma. Bachiang district is at the base of the Bolaven Plateau and is a poor area

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136 See Section 3.4.1 for further discussion of the ethics of confidentiality.
137 The ten districts in Champasak Province are shown in Map 2.
138 See Section 3.1.2 for details of the conduct of the Stage 2 ethnographic fieldwork and Appendix 4 for a schedule of when these visits took place.

where people are dependent on growing vegetables and fruit, but recent improvements to roads are opening up markets and increasing incomes.

An overview of the four villages and schools in which the research was undertaken is presented in Table 5.1. As shown, three of the schools had similar enrolments, while in Sukuma the school enrolment was approximately double that of the others. There were also differences in the size of the classes taught by the beginning teachers (from 31 to 70 students) and in the grade level of their classes (three Grade 3 classes and one Grade 1 class). However, in all cases the teachers were working as 'volunteers' in 'complete' schools[139] alongside permanent teachers.

Table 5.1: Overview of the work situations of the four beginning teachers

	Case Record 1	Case Record 2	Case Record 3	Case Record 4
BEGINNING TEACHER				
Name	Mr Bounyang	Miss Tiputai	Mr Khamxing	Miss Seng
Status	volunteer	volunteer	volunteer	volunteer
VILLAGE				
District	Paksong	Sukuma	Bachiang	Champasak
Village name	Sukumnoyi	Nongsavanh	Nakasan	Salai
Population	954	1870	722	1178
Number of households	152	266	124	231
SCHOOL				
Type - complete or multi-grade	complete	complete	complete	complete
Number of satellite schools	0	1	2	0
Number of enrolled students	168	339*	198*	165
Number (%) of females enrolled	88 (52%)	189 (56%)	99 (50%)	87 (53%)
Number of staff	4	10*	5*	7
Number (%) of female staff	2 (50%)	9 (90%)*	2 (40%)*	5 (83%)
Level of beginning teacher's class	Grade 1	Grade 3	Grade 3	Grade 3
Number of students in class	61	70	36	31
Number (%) of females in class	39 (64%)	31 (44%)	17 (47%)	15 (49%)

NOTE: * = excluding satellite schools

Case records describing the villages and schools where the beginning teachers worked, and portrayals of their families, their colleagues and the students they taught, are provided in Appendix 1 in greater detail than would be possible were they included in the body of this thesis. Any reader who is unfamiliar with rural life in Laos may find it valuable before

[139] See Chaper 1, Footnote 3 for 'volunteer' teacher and Chapter 1, Footnote 37 for 'complete' and 'satellite' schools.

continuing, to now look at the background material provided in these case records. This chapter makes direct comparisons between the four villages and schools and also identifies commonalities between sites which allow for some generalisations.

5.1 Village Life

Village life exerts a major influence over the functioning of the school and therefore impacts on the professional experiences of beginning teachers. In each of the four villages the smoothly planned school year was in practice punctuated by unscheduled events and activities, many originating in the life of the village. These included seasonal farming activities, religious and cultural festivals, social celebrations, ceremonies organised by the government, and ceremonies organised by the school. Their effect was two-fold. On the one hand school attendance, the hours available for teaching, and the pace at which the curriculum could be taught, all suffered. On the other hand, many of the events provided opportunities for participation and involvement by the school and opportunities for the beginning teachers to be recognised in their new roles by the wider community. What follows is a description of some of these events and activities and a discussion of the impact they had on the professional lives of the beginning teachers.

5.1.1 Farming activities

In Champasak and Sukuma districts, the main agricultural activity is wet-land rice farming. Planting usually starts in June, about the same time that school finishes. Then the rice is ready to harvest three months later at the start of the school year. During my first visits I saw how the beginning teachers were called upon to 'cover' for other teachers and to take their classes. As Seng explained, when asked if she had looked after the other teachers' classes while they finished harvesting, *"I couldn't say 'no' as I wanted to get on with the staff"* (Seng: Visit 1. Interview 1). Similarly it was clear to Tiputai that when the deputy principal went off for a week or so to buy rice after the harvest, she had no choice but to 'mind' this other class for the deputy principal.

In Paksong and Bachiang districts the people rely on coffee or vegetable crops that in the main are planted and harvested during the school year. The beginning teachers in these districts also recounted how they looked after classes for their colleagues when it was planting or harvest-time. The principal often called on Bounyang to mind his class while he went off and worked in his coffee fields. Bounyang's experience, described below, although an extreme example, conveys the powerlessness of the new teacher:

When I arrived today Bounyang was supervising the entire school of 168 students - five classes in all. There were no other teachers. The principal, who taught Grades 4 and 5, was 'busy' and Bounyang thought he was tending his coffee bushes; the Grade 2 teacher was on maternity leave; the Grade 3 teacher, who was supposed to be minding the Grade 2 class, had gone away on a practicum as part of the requirements of her upgrading course - and so all classes were being 'taught' by Bounyang. This, he told me, had been the situation for the last two weeks out of the past six since my last visit (and now it appeared that it would continue during this week of visits). He said "I have learnt to walk to each classroom and set work on the board as this keeps the students reasonably quiet - if I don't do anything they start to fight and make a lot of noise". Suddenly the formal questions I had prepared to ask him about his professional development seemed absurd, and instead we simply talked about how he was 'surviving'.

(Sukumnoyi Village: Visit 2. Journal Notes)

Similarly, Khamxing often looked after the Grade 1 teacher's class when he went to his fields, but Khamxing did this more willingly knowing that this other 'volunteer' had no family in the village to support him, and no other source of income.

The first rains arrived last night. This morning, when I arrived at school, there was a noticeable lack of staff and students. Khamxing told me that everyone had gone to the fields. If it weren't for my visit I think he would have gone too. Instead he waited with me for half an hour until the principal arrived and then together they decided to close the school. As soon as the decision was announced the few students that had turned up took off. I followed Khamxing down to his family's field. His parents were there planting peanuts. As they walked along the rows they prodded the soil with a bamboo pole to create a small hole, dropped a peanut or two in, and then covered the hole over. Khamxing told me that last year they got about $400 for their peanuts and that it's important to get them planted as soon as the rain arrives.

(Nakasan Village: Visit 4. Journal Notes)

The journal notes quoted above record how sometimes principals made decisions to close their schools so that teachers and students could attend to their fields when planting or harvesting was the priority. At other times there was just an expectation that the new teachers would take on the responsibility of other classes and 'help out'. Khamxing reported that by week 3 he had received a talk from his principal about the importance of *"saamaki"* or "solidarity" - about getting on with the other teachers and maintaining harmony in the school. At the end of the year, Bounyang reflected on the many times when he was left to 'mind' the whole school and explained how he had wanted to say something to the other teachers but *"didn't have the confidence and didn't dare to*" (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 4).

5.1.2 Religious and cultural festivals

Theravada Buddhism is practiced in each of the four villages in the study where much of life centres on the *vat*.[140] The religious ceremonies and festivals are important events in village life and each household supports them, for example by cooking food or decorating the *vat*. Everyone participates and teachers are no exception. In Khamxing's village, during *Ork Phansa,*[141] the festival to mark the end of Buddhist Lent, when the monks called from the *vat* for villagers to help with cleaning and construction, the school was closed. In Seng's village, at the time of *Boun Bang Fai*[142] festival the school was closed for two days as teachers and students attended the religious ceremonies in the *vat* and then the celebrations in the village. Then in all the schools the official one-week break for *Pi Mai Lao,*[143] the New Year holiday, was extended - in Tiputai's school by an additional week and in the other schools by several additional days of unofficial leave.

For some festivals the teachers took on formal roles training students for direct involvement. Three months after starting work Seng was asked by the principal to teach some students to dance and this activity continued for the next six months. Tiputai was called on to teach her students how to parade and pray at the village *Boun Phra Vet,*[144] a festival that had traditionally been organised by the monks but in recent years the school had become involved by training students to perform during the ceremony.

5.1.3 Social celebrations and obligations

As in most societies, births, deaths, and weddings were important events, and by their nature part of the unplanned aspects of village life. Funeral ceremonies tended to be lengthy, lasting for up to a week before the cremation, and involved relatives of the deceased in extensive socialising over this time. *Baci*[145] ceremonies were ubiquitous, held for events as diverse as a birth, a wedding, the completion of a new house, or even the construction of a toilet, and celebrated whenever the day was auspicious rather than when it was a convenient weekend. At each *Baci* the family provided food and invited relatives and neighbours to

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140 The *vat*, or Buddhist monastery, is the religious, cultural and communal centre of every Lao Buddhist village.

141 The *Ork Phansa* is the festival which marks the end of the period of retreat of the monks during Buddhist Lent, the "*retreat of the rains*". See Stuart-Fox & Mixay (2010) for a detailed account of Lao festivals and ceremonies.

142 The *Boun Bang Fai*, or Rocket Festival, is an "*ancient fertility festival ... performed to ensure a copious monsoon*" (*ibid*., p.43)

143 The *Pi Mai Lao* New Year holiday extends over several days and incorporates both religious ceremonies and observances as well as the public fun of water 'splashing' in the streets and villages (*ibid*., pp. 23-41).

144 The *Boun Phra Vet* is an important Lao festival held annually in each Lao village and "*commemorates Prince Vessantara, the last incarnation of the Buddha before his historical appearance in north India in the sixth century BCE*" (*ibid*., p. 47).

145 A *Baci Sukhuan,* or commonly a *Baci,* is a traditional Lao celebration where wishes are made by a song man to bring 'merit' and good luck. The ceremony emphasises *"the value of life, of social and family bonds, of forgiveness, renewal and homage to heavenly beings*" (Evans, 1998, p. 77).

participate in the celebration. In the villages the school teachers took it in turns to mind each other's classes so that everyone could attend the *baci*. Each of the beginning teachers reported that during the year, in order to show respect to their neighbours and relatives, they had stopped teaching on at least five or six occasions to attend a funeral or a wedding or a *Baci*. However, from observations, it appeared that the beginning teachers were the ones who spent the least amount of time at such events, usually returning to school after the ceremony rather than absenting themselves for the whole day.

5.1.4 Government sponsored ceremonies

During the period of the study the authorities in Bachiang district decided to grant a Developed Village Award to Khamxing's village. As described in Appendix 1, Case Record 3, much of the activity in Khamxing's school during the first three months of the academic year was focused on preparation for the official award ceremony. Over the previous year the village had first gained four sub-awards[146] and for each of these a one-day ceremony had been held and the school had closed each time so that the teachers and students could participate. In the lead-up to this final award the principal had suspended lessons for two weeks as teachers and villagers worked to build three external walls on their school and while Khamxing trained a group of students to dance and parade. The Developed Village Award was presented by the District Governor and was considered a significant achievement for the community.

While only Khamxing's village was involved in this type of official award ceremony during the year of the research, Seng's village was told to prepare for the same award. Seng was then assigned the task of teaching the students to dance in preparation for the ceremony and on many afternoons throughout the year I observed her training them. It was an activity which gave her recognition in the community and ultimately a lot of satisfaction. She said she was pleased that the principal had asked her to undertake this task as in many ways it was preferable to teaching, as she did not have to manage unruly behaviour.

[146] Pre-requisite sub-awards for the Developed Village Award include the Cultural Village Award, the Crimeless Village Award, the Healthy and Hygienic Village Award, and the Model Village School Award. See also Appendix 1, Case Record 3 for a description of the ceremony that took place when a village received the Model Village Award.

5.1.5 School ceremonies

Opening ceremonies were regular, scheduled features of school life. These were generally held within the first few weeks of the new academic year and attended by local village committee members, heads of work-groups and some parents. In Tiputai's school several members of staff from the DEB also attended. In Seng's school, as the principal was about to retire sometime in the first half of the year, the school's opening ceremony never happened with the result that many villagers were never introduced to Seng or saw her as part of the school staff.

The other annual event listed on the school calendar was National Teachers' Day.[147] At two schools the ceremonies spread out over the week as the school organised events for the central as well as the satellite schools. The principal at Khamxing's school justified these occasions as being used *"to create solidarity between the central school and the satellite schools"* (Nakasan Village, Principal: Visit 1. Interview 1).

These school ceremonies were opportunities for the new teachers to be formally introduced to the community. As described in Appendix 1, Case Record 3, Khamxing's principal had directed him to read out the key speech about the history of Teachers' Day. While the three other schools positioned the new teachers to take less important roles, they nevertheless had them sit on the stage with the rest of the teachers so that they were visible to the villagers as part of the staff. All of the beginning teachers reported playing supportive roles on these occasions as they were called upon to prepare facilities, cook food, welcome guests, and then after the speeches, to help serve the guests. Leading up to the ceremonies they were asked by their principals to help train students to dance, pray, or to march.

5.1.6 The impact of village events and activities on the beginning teachers

After nine months of study at the TTC the four beginning teachers had returned to live and work in either the villages in which they were born, or in Seng's case, to work in a neighbouring village. They were back, with all the usual demands of social, religious and cultural life on them. But now they were also teachers learning to negotiate the pressures of

[147] Teachers' Day has been celebrated nationally since 7 October 1994. On the day students listen to speeches exhorting them to show respect for their teachers and then students present their teachers with flowers and small gifts. Ostensibly the day is in honour of Mr Kham, one of the first Lao teachers to work in the French school system, and an account of his life is given in speeches across the country. Mr Kham started teaching at the Buddhist Monk Teachers' Training Institute at Vat Chanh in 1907 and in 1913 he began working at Tafforin School in Vientiane. In November 1920, Mr Kham led a nationalist movement in Vientiane against the French colonists. He was arrested and jailed but managed to escape and fled to Thailand where he died in 1949. (Lao Voices, 2009).

village life from a new perspective and adapting to their developing status. Many of the activities, events and ceremonies described above were unscheduled and therefore eroded the time officially available to get through the curriculum. They also often resulted in significant pressure being placed upon the beginning teachers when they were required to look after other classes besides their own. Other events, such as National Teachers' Day, were scheduled, but extended far beyond the official limits and therefore also cut into teaching time.

However, not all aspects of these events were negative as they provided the beginning teachers with the opportunity for personal recognition and with it, increased status in the community. Each of the beginning teachers reported that after a few months of teaching they felt that other villagers - their friends and neighbours as well as others less well known - were according them a new degree of respect. Seng spoke of how once she had trained her students and they had performed at the village ceremony, she was seen in the neighbouring school as a 'real' teacher. Tiputai recalled how when she walked through the village, some villagers would now *"knop"*[148] and acknowledge her, no longer using her personal name, but using a formal mode of address: *"Ku"* - "Teacher". Khamxing also recalled feeling that other villagers were more respectful towards him and how this had first occurred after his involvement in helping students prepare for a village ceremony:

> *At night they would call my name over the loudspeaker to tell the students to come to school to practice dancing with me. I felt proud that everyone could hear my name and know that I was the person helping them prepare for the Village Award ceremony.*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 2. Interview 1)

The village events also presented the beginning teachers with potential opportunities for them to enrich the curriculum and their lessons in the classroom. The extent to which this was actually done is discussed in the next chapter.

[148] To *'knop'* is to place the palms together on the chest and to bow slightly in both greeting and as a sign of respect.

5.2 Village Authorities

> *The most important person in the village is the Village Head and then after him it is the Head of the Lao Front.*[149] *For any kind of work the school wants to do we must first ask these people, and only if they agree can we continue with our plans.*
>
> (Sukumnoyi Village Principal: Visit 4. Interview 1)

5.2.1 The Lao village

Lao villages have been described by Ireson (1996) as *"self-sustaining communities relatively unconnected with larger political or social units"* (p. 221). From this perspective they are stable, naturally cooperative communities existing in large measure in isolation from the state. However, state representations declare the village to be the *"implementation unit"*[150] of the Government's decentralisation policies, that through communal action and the donation of goods and labour, will lead to the 'eradication of poverty'. High (2006) takes aim at both depictions: *"the village as a solidary unit emerges not as a pre-supposed characteristic of the Lao village, but as a contested ideal"* (p. 42). The evidence of the observations collected through the current study support this latter position – while some villages appeared to willingly contribute to the construction and maintenance of the school, and to the support of its teachers, in others there was a clear reluctance to do so. As High notes: "*The labour required ... euphemized as 'thin pasaason' (people's funds) in Lao, or as 'participation' in the international language of development interventions, is still labour. It is arduous, time-consuming, and tiring"* (*ibid.,* p. 39).

In this thesis a 'common-sense' notion of 'village' is adopted - it is taken to be a clustered group of people living in close proximity, and the lowest level of government administration. In administrative terms village units extend throughout all areas of the country[151] and encompass urban as well as rural areas. Each village has its own *Cat Tang Baan* - the Village Committee, with a Village Head and two deputies. Elections are held in each village every few years to choose the Village Head from district nominees; however, although a government salary accompanies the position, the wage is low and the job, which requires the Head to pass on Government dictates, is unpopular and rarely sought (*ibid*.).

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149 The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) or *Neo Hom* is one of the four mass organisations that operate down to the village level as an arm of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP).

150 Prime Ministerial decree: (No. 01/PM/March 11, 2000): *"build the provinces as the strategic units, the districts as the planning and fiscal units, and the villages as the implementation units".*

151 In 2005 the Lao National Statistics Centre recorded the number of villages in the country as 10,552. By 2009 the reported figure had dropped by 17.5% to 8,704. Whether this reduction is the result of more accurate data collection, internal migration or forced resettlement is a delicate and moot point. See Vandergeest (2003), and Baird and Shoemaker (2005) for an examination of the phenomenon of shifting settlement in Lao PDR.

Among other duties the Village Head is responsible for maintaining law and order, overseeing village 'development' and collating village statistics. Other members of the Village Committee are unpaid and include two Deputy Heads, one in charge of security (identity cards, movement of people, armed men rostered to patrol at night), the other for matters relating to culture and education.

5.2.2 Role of the Village Education Development Committee

In September 2008 the Government introduced the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC)[152] as a new structure[153] to address the provision of *"quality"* education through a *"demand-driven approach"*. Duties of the VEDC include the collection of data (number of children, village literacy rate, dropouts, etc), the preparation of a Village Education Development Plan, the creation of a Village Education Development Fund from village contributions (cash, materials, or labour) and the conduct of research and analysis *"to find appropriate solutions"* so that the school meets the Government's Millennium Development Goal 2 of having all children complete five years of compulsory education by 2015. In all four villages a VEDC had been convened, but as described below, only one of these worked as an effective body in terms of the support it gave to teachers and the school.

In Bounyang's village, where historically the villagers had worked hard to build the school, there was an active VEDC. On the first day of the school year it was members of the VEDC who went to the Paksong DEB office when they heard that Bounyang, one of their own, had been assigned to teach in a different village.[154] Surprisingly, their intervention was successful. During the school opening ceremony, VEDC members had attended and spoken to the parents about the role of the teacher and the reasons why families needed to pay fees to support the school and the 'volunteer' teachers. It was the VEDC that took on the responsibility of collecting fees from each family and gave the funds to the principal to give to the two volunteer teachers. The VEDC also saw that each of the eight *cu* or 'work-groups' in the village provided the school with benches and tables for the new school year.

In Tiputai's village in Sukuma district, the Village Head and the school principal were both active in promoting the interests of the school, but this was done in collaboration from

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[152] The Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) is made up of (i) Head of Village as Chairperson; (ii) Head of Village National Front Organization as Vice Chairperson; (iii) School Principal as the Secretary; (iv) Representative of Teachers (member); (v) Chief of Village Lao Women's Union (member); (vi) Secretary of Village Youth Union (member); (vii) Chief of Parent and Teachers' Association (member). The official responsibilities of the VEDC are set out in MoE (2008c) *Decree No.230/MoE-.DoP.08*.

[153] The Parent and Teachers' Associations pre-date the VEDC and membership for this group is allowed for on the VEDC; however, in none of the four schools in the study did a Parent and Teacher Association appear to be active.

[154] See Appendix 1, Case Record 1, for an account of this event.

their formal positions, rather than as members of a committee. While in discussion both acknowledged the formation of a VEDC, in practice the committee appeared to be inactive. A few years prior to the study, and before the creation of the VEDC, the new school had been built by village labour organised through the Village Committee by the Village Head and the school principal. Although not stated explicitly, the feeling conveyed was that these two men, who had been in their respective positions for many years, saw no need for a VEDC and were in no hurry to convene one. However, at the time of the study it appeared that the Village Head was experiencing difficulties in organising villagers to make new furniture for the school, and although the issue had been raised by him during his speech at the school opening ceremony, no new furniture was provided during the year. Neither was there much direct support for the new teachers. At the beginning of the year, the Village Head had promised to collect a kilogram of rice from each family to distribute to each of the five 'volunteer' teachers, (four at the lower secondary school and one at the primary school); however, by the end of the year each new teacher had received only about 10 kilograms of rice. Tiputai, herself, had no formal communication with the VEDC or the Village Committee members. The only opportunity she had to hear what the Village Head thought about the teachers' role for educating the children of the village was in his speech at the school opening ceremony:

> *We know that education is the way to develop our country and we are very proud of the teachers here. There are some things that the teachers need to improve ... the teachers should use more specific techniques to get students to come to school. The teachers shouldn't be afraid of the parents as the students listen to the teachers more than to their parents. I want the teachers to tell the students that they must help their parents. In the past the children were very polite to their parents and when they saw adults they would bow down to them but they don't do that now - the teachers should punish them. They should be stricter and should be good role models for the students like coming to school on time, working together and getting on with each other. We understand that the teachers are in a difficult situation - they don't earn but they should remember that they have good status in the community.*
>
> (Nongsavanh Village Head: Visit 1. Journal Notes)

In Khamxing's village in Bachiang district the Village Committee convened a VEDC. After some lobbying by the VEDC the Village Committee had agreed that a new school was needed. The rights to the village pond were sold to raise funds and the Village Committee had organised for volunteers to assist the teachers to build the new three-walled school. The committee had also organised for benches and tables to be donated both from the main village

as well as from the neighbouring hamlet. The VEDC however, did not involve itself in collecting money or rice for the volunteer teachers but rather left this work to the principal.

At Seng's school in Champasak district the VEDC was virtually non-existent. The school had received its new building and furniture from the Japanese and there were few physical resources that the school needed. As far as could be ascertained, the VEDC had never met and existed on paper only. The collection of data on the school students and staff was undertaken by the principal and a Village Education Development Plan was yet to be drawn up. The original principal, who retired during the first semester, did little to facilitate formal communication between the school staff and the village authorities so that even three months into the new school year, the two Deputy Village Heads said they did not know that the school had a new teacher. It was not until the new principal took over the leadership of the school that Seng, through the principal's support, twice received payments of 200,000 kip ($US25) from the Village Committee during the year.

5.2.3 Reporting to the DEB

In the listed duties of the VEDC there is no requirement for the village authorities to report on the progress of beginning teachers.[155] In Bounyang's village, however, the VEDC did submit comments on the beginning teachers as the principal had told them this was what the DEB required. When asked what areas they reported on the Village Head explained:

> *The DEB didn't tell us how long the new teachers will be 'volunteer' teachers but they said that we need to observe and evaluate them and make a report. If the new teacher is good then the VEDC will report to the DEB. This is what we did last year and we will do this again for Bounyang. About the criteria we use, first we see if they come to school on time and every day. Then we look at the learning results of the students. It doesn't matter if the students can't do something, say for example they can't read but they have to be seen to be improving. The second main criteria for the teacher is the learning result - you see even if the teacher teaches all year but the students still can't read then we won't write a good report. But from what we can see this year, we are happy with the new teacher - he is punctual and comes to school regularly - the parents like him and he is a responsible person. He might be in charge of the school one day.*
>
> (Sukumnoyi Village Head: Visit 1. Interview 1)

However, at no stage in the year did any member of the VEDC, apart from the principal, talk with Bounyang about his work, examine his lesson plans, or observe him at work. In the three

[155] See MoE (2008c) Ministerial *Decree No.230/MoE-.DoP.08.*

other schools any reporting to the DEB about the teacher's progress was left up to the principal, but again, there was no clear process for evaluation of the teacher's performance.

5.2.4 Influence of village authorities on the beginning teachers

In only one case did the village authorities function at a level where they were able to organise regular financial support to the beginning teacher and to the school. In none of the cases was there formal communication between the beginning teacher and the village authorities. Rather, communications between the school and the VEDC were mediated through the principal. While the formal avenues of school-community events, such as school opening ceremonies, allowed teachers to hear the opinions of the village authorities about the school, there were no formal opportunities for the authorities to hear anything from the beginning teachers. Bounyang reported that he had communicated informally with the Committee about the conditions at school through his relatives on the VEDC; however, none of the other beginning teachers reported trying to communicate either formally or informally with village authorities about their work and personal circumstances. Even when VEDC members were aware that new teachers were experiencing difficult conditions, such as minding classes when other teachers did not attend, there appeared no evidence that they could do anything about it. As the former Village Head explained:

> *It's difficult to change principals. The DEB doesn't know about the principal here and doesn't come and ask the Village Committee about what they think. It's a shame because in fact he is not such a good role model for the other teachers.*
>
> (Sukumnoyi Former Village Head: Visit 4. Interview 1)

5.3 The District Education Bureau

Under the decentralised structure of the Lao education system,[156] the deployment of teachers is delegated to the district level. The 142 DEBs play significant roles in the administration of the schools in their district and their work has the potential to impact upon the careers of teachers in both positive and negative ways. There were several different ways the beginning teachers had contact with DEB staff and these are discussed below.

[156] See Appendix 2 for a description of the Lao education system.

5.3.1 Recruitment and deployment of teachers

For the four beginning teachers, initial communication with the DEB revolved around the common objectives of being recruited, deployed and made permanent. In all cases the process was similar - after graduation, and during the three month long holiday between the academic years, the prospective teachers took their graduation certificates to the DEB office in their home districts and left them there.[157] No formal interviews were conducted. Prior to the start of the school year each person was then required to come back to the DEB to find out the name of the school to which they had been posted and to pick up an official *"notice of appointment"* to present to the school principal. The only variation to this pattern was that Seng was instructed to attend a meeting at the DEB with other prospective teachers from the district to hear a talk about *"the responsibilities of a teacher"* and then to pick up her *"notice of appointment"*.

5.3.2 Becoming permanent

For a young teacher trying to obtain a permanent position, the pathway through the DEB bureaucracy can be difficult, daunting and lengthy. The second kind of contact teachers reported having with the DEB involved the processes that led to permanency. One description of the selection criteria used for permanency was given by a Pedagogical Advisor (PA):

> *After a year the new teachers are inspected and evaluated. First we look at their moral and ethical attitudes, then we look at their teaching and how they work around the school and get on with the community. Getting on with the community is really important. In the past we relied on the principals to report on the way the new teachers were going, and before we didn't actually care where the teachers were teaching but now we try to be more careful. If they are considered acceptable, then in the second year their names are put on a list. Two years ago we started to consider whether the teacher was from the local area, or whether they were teaching in a remote area away from home. We now think that these teachers should get priority. This has been suggested by the PES but there have been no formal directives yet.*
>
> (DEB Pedagogical Advisor: Visit 4. Interview 1)

While this response sets out a process, there were questions that remained unanswered, and due to their sensitivity went unasked as well. The PA's own daughter received permanency in her first year when she was not teaching in a village away from her home while another teacher in the same school who graduated at the same time but who was from

[157] Candidates are not restricted to applying for positions in their home districts. Some graduates apply for postings to districts with known shortages in the hope of gaining preference for permanency.

another district, had, two years later, still not been given any indication of when he might be made permanent. Contrary to what the PA reported, the Deputy Director of the same DEB said that *"there were no criteria for selecting new teachers to be given permanency and that they were just put on a list"* (DEB Deputy Director: Visit 4. Interview 1). He explained that the DEB staff were still waiting for some guidelines from the PES. In later interviews staff from the PES confirmed that this was the situation and that consideration of who would obtain permanency was made on a *"case-by-case"* basis. While the process[158] was said to involve *"consideration of how the beginning teacher got on with others"* and the person's *"teaching performance",* no one in the DEBs or in the PES were able to satisfy my request to see the set of *"objective criteria"* used to assess the teaching performance of volunteer teachers. From interviews with Deputy Directors of each of the four DEBs there appears to be no standard approach to the issue of determining who is eligible to become permanent.

Not only were the criteria for permanency uncertain, the actual process for becoming permanent was not clear and probably differs from district to district. However, Tiputai and Seng obtained advice from other staff on what they should do and both went through a similar process. About three months into the school year they were instructed by the DEB to apply for permanency. One teacher talked openly about the fact that 'gifts' had been sent to the DEB to facilitate this stage along with some of her family's newly-harvested rice – however, the other beginning teachers were reluctant to talk about this topic. Further evidence that payments may have been necessary, at least in some DEBs, came from one teacher's father who stated that permanency could be obtained "*at a price*". However, such matters were obviously delicate and therefore were never put to any DEB staff member for confirmation.[159]

Towards the end of the first semester the DEBs, through the respective principals, contacted Seng and Tiputai and told them they could apply for permanency. This required taking residency papers and other official documents[160] to the DEB for sighting then sent on to the PES. Both teachers reported taking a few days off to undertake their visits to the district

158 In 2007 the MoE published a *National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NCTC) (MoE, 2007a)* for primary school teachers. Kittiphanh (2009) describes the NCTC as "*a vision statement which now needs to be transformed into a practical hands-on tool for assessing teacher performance*" (p. 72); however, it is unclear at the levels of the MoE and the PES how these competencies are to be used. In 2008 the Ministry then prepared a set of *National Teacher Awards Criteria for Academic Teachers* (MoE, 2008b); however, from discussions within the MoE it appears that neither set of criteria have been considered in relation to assessing the performance of new teachers.

159 Keuleers (2004) and Stuart-Fox (2006, 2008) have examined corruption in Laos and both claim it is endemic across all sectors. It was commonly rumoured that end-of-year high school exam results could be purchased and that entry to tertiary institutions could be facilitated through unofficial payments. While such practices eat away at the heart of the education system, they are understandable in light of salaries for teachers and college lecturers that are so low that it is impossible to survive on them alone and other sources of income must be found.

160 Documents include application form, identity card, residency certificate, family book, graduation certificate, personal biography and photo.

and provincial towns. Finally, in Semester 2, after the documents had been processed by the PES they were submitted to the relevant DEB. As far as Seng and Tiputai were able to ascertain no formal reports were written on them, but one principal said he had given a report *"by word of mouth"*. Late in the year both Seng and Tiputai received advice from the DEB that they would be made permanent the following year.

For Khamxing and Bounyang the future was more uncertain. Both were still waiting to be told to apply, but the process appeared to have stalled at this point. Whether this was simply bureaucratic inertia or whether it signalled the need for further 'inducements' to move the process on was not clear. By the end of the year both teachers seemed resigned to another year as 'volunteers'.

5.3.3 Attendance at school ceremonies

For two of the beginning teachers, another kind of contact with the DEB took place in the first few weeks of the year, when several DEB staff attended the annual opening ceremony at the respective schools. Although both beginning teachers said they were ignored by the DEB staff, Tiputai was still able to report *"at least I was able to see who they were"*. DEB staff also attended one National Teachers' Day celebration and the Model School Award ceremony at Khamxing's school. Again, these events allowed the beginning teachers to see who the DEB staff were but there were no reports of professional discussions related to teaching in the classroom or of questions asked about how they, as beginning teachers, were being supported in their unpaid positions by the community.

5.3.4 Contact with pedagogical advisors

An averaged-sized DEB has a staff of around 30, three or four of whom are Pedagogical Advisors (PAs).[161] As the title suggests, the main responsibility of the PA is to provide 'pedagogical support' to the primary school teachers in the district. On average each PA is responsible for supporting 10 to 12 complete schools and any satellite schools - typically around 70 primary school teachers. However, in all four schools in the study, the main role of

[161] The *6th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) (2006-2010)* (GoL, 2006a) claimed 489 PAs across the 142 DEBs in Laos of whom 158 were female.

the PAs was 'inspectorial' rather than one of 'pedagogical support'.[162] Except for Khamxing, whose uncle was the PA for his school, the beginning teachers reported that over the year they had little contact with their PA. They also reported, (including Khamxing), that neither the PA nor any other DEB member of staff provided specific advice about how to teach. The beginning teachers also reported feeling unconfident about approaching the PAs with questions about teaching and simply waited to be approached – and that never happened.

In general the beginning teachers perceived the PAs as *"experienced"* and *"knowledgeable"*. However, they all said that even if they had the opportunity to do so, they would be hesitant to approach the PA and directly ask questions about teaching. From their perspective they needed to wait for the PA to first initiate contact and then to provide advice. Tiputai reflected on the type of contact she would have liked to have had with the PA:

> *Someone from the DEB should visit the teachers once a month so that we can see that they are interested in us - not just to inspect us but to observe what teachers are doing and to talk to us about our teaching - what can be improved and what good things they think we are doing. And they should visit all the teachers, not just the new ones, or else it would feel more like an evaluation.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 2)

The reality, however, is that without improved professional development[163] for the PAs themselves, many might find it difficult to provide the kind of practical advice which the beginning teachers were suggesting they needed. Many of the PAs were older and had had many years of work experience. Khamxing's uncle, a PA, recalled how he had first taught in the same school 32 years before and how in his first job he was told to teach five grades. It is not surprising that he thought his nephew had an *"easy job"* of teaching 36 Grade 1 students with enough textbooks so that each student could see the page. The PAs appeared to be used to their role as 'inspectors' and privately explained that they preferred to delegate responsibilities for pedagogical support and advice to the principals.

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[162] Except for a short in-service program in 2006 funded by the TTEST project, there is no evidence that the PAs in the four districts where this study was undertaken had received any special training as instructors. PAs were supposed to be people who had the necessary experience to provide advice on classroom teaching but in practice most PAs had been away from the classroom for many years and had had little chance to upgrade their own knowledge about the 'new teaching methods' that were being taught in the TEIs. As noted in a UNESCO (2008) report: "*DEB staff have little chance of training to effectively take up new responsibilities and requirements transferred under decentralization"* (p. 10).

[163] Over the period 2005-2008, as part of the TTEST project, a large-scale primary teacher "*Active Learning*" inservice training program was mounted by the MoE. This involved the initial training of three PAs as well as several other DEB staff in each of 74 DEBs in 9 targeted provinces to become the delivers of the inservice program. Observational and anecdotal notes made by myself during this training, record that many PAs were inexperienced in and lacked understanding of 'learner-centred' approaches. In my view the large majority of the DEB staff could not be trained sufficiently in the 10 days of allocated time to become efficient and effective trainers of 'modern methodologies'.

5.3.5 School inspections

During their first year of teaching, two of the four beginning teachers were inspected by the DEB. These inspections were carried out on a spot-check basis to ensure that school numbers were being properly kept and to examine lesson plans. When the beginning teachers started work they were told by the principal that they might be inspected by the DEB and as Tiputai put it, they were then *"waiting for contact*". To this end the new teachers completed a yearly plan, a plan for each semester, and individual lesson plans.

For Tiputai, the inspection occurred during an unannounced visit by the DEB. As it coincided with my third visit to her school I was able to observe events from the veranda.

> *This morning five DEB staff arrived on a surprise visit. The teachers were on an extended tea break when an old Toyota pick-up drove into the school grounds. When the teachers realised who it was they all scurried back to their classrooms. The visitors met with the Deputy Principal (the Principal was sick) and told her they wanted to check the school's records and the teachers' lesson plans. A table and a single chair were placed at one end of the veranda, and while the rest of the DEB staff relaxed in the staff room, the PA sat down and inspected the teachers' plans. One-by-one, without any prior warning, the teachers were called upon to show their plans and to answer questions about them. Tiputai went first, followed by several others. Then the bell rang and the inspections stopped even though not all teachers had shown their plans. The DEB team adjourned to the Deputy Principal's house, then after lunch departed the village without coming back to the school. This afternoon I asked Tiputai what was said to her and if she had received any feedback. She told me that the PA had been pleased and praised her because she had kept her book neat and clean and because she had entered in all the required data such as enrolment, absences and test results. No other comments were made. The content of her lesson plans was not discussed, no general advice was given, and no questions asked about how she was finding her job or whether the village was supporting her. The Deputy Principal also expressed her satisfaction with the visit: 'It was okay, they only checked a few teachers and they told me they were pleased - no one was criticised'. The evidence that lesson plans were being written and numbers were being kept seemed to be the only thing in which the DEB staff were interested.*
>
> (Nongsavanh Village: Visit 3. Journal Notes)

The beginning teachers whose schools were not inspected were simply told to keep their lesson plans for their second year. Khamxing, however, was inspected early in the year by his uncle, a PA, and this coincided with the inspection the DEB staff carried out prior to his school receiving the Model School Award. While Khamxing reported that he was given no

specific feedback, he was told that his plans were *"good"* and *"to keep on planning throughout the year"*.

5.3.6 The influence of the DEB on beginning teachers

The main way in which the DEB staff exerted influence over the new teachers was through decisions regarding appointments and permanency. Communication with the DEB appeared to flow 'one-way' and the new teachers reported that at no stage in the year had they felt it appropriate to ask DEB staff about any of the issues they were experiencing with their teaching. Addressing such matters had been left to the principals who had been delegated the responsibility for providing pedagogical support to new teachers by the DEB. The extent to which the principals actually provided such support is examined in the next section.

5.4 The Principal

This section refers to the principals in the four schools. In Seng's school the male principal, who rarely came to school, retired after about three months into the school year and his position after my observational visit 2, was filled by a new female principal. Unless otherwise stated, it is this new female principal who is referred to as one of the *"four principals"* or as "*Seng's principal*".

5.4.1 Duties of the principal

The official duty statement for primary school principals lists seven key responsibilities.[164] While there is a general responsibility to provide pedagogical support to all staff - *"the principal should observe other teachers teaching regularly in order to help improve and develop their skills"* (MoE, 2004, p.77) - there is no specific guidance on how to support 'new' teachers. However, each of the four principals stated that beginning teachers require some additional support, particularly involving administration and reporting, and to a lesser extent about teaching. As one principal explained, *"they have just completed college so they know about teaching and it's the school administration that they need help with"* (Sukumnoyi Principal: Visit 4. Interview 1). Observations suggested that some principals were also supporting the beginning teachers in two other ways - helping them obtain financial support from the community while they worked as volunteer teachers; and providing 'protection' from criticism from outside. These four kinds of support are discussed below.

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[164] The duties of principals are described in the *School Management and Primary School Principals' Manual* (MoE, 2004).

5.4.2 Advice about administration and reporting

The four principals all focused their support for the beginning teachers on administrative and reporting requirements. Teachers were instructed to prepare an annual plan and teaching plans for each semester, to write individual lesson plans, to design monthly tests, and to report monthly data on 12 areas.[165] Annual and semester plans for each teacher were then commonly pasted on the staffroom or office walls, not for easy reference, but as one principal explained, *"in case the DEB come"*. Lesson plans were kept in each teacher's notebook and were shown to the principal for 'sighting' rather than for feedback or advice.

In three of the schools the beginning teachers reported that their principals explained the basic procedures; however, in Bounyang's case, advice was not so forthcoming:

> *At the beginning of the year I asked the Principal about what I had to do. At first he didn't offer any advice and just left me alone to find out myself. After I asked him again he told me how to make the yearly and monthly plans and then after that I mainly asked the Grade 2/3 teacher.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 1. Interview 1)

In some schools the principal delegated another teacher to provide advice about how to carry out administrative tasks. For both Seng, before her first principal retired, and Tiputai, whose principal was sick, other senior teachers had been told to give advice to the new teacher. However, both Seng and Tiputai reported asking friends or relatives on the staff to further explain how to complete the monthly test reports. Bounyang and Khamxing both received advice directly from the principal, but explained that if they didn't understand the instructions then they asked a young teacher - someone they felt *"closer to"*. Like Bounyang, they all hesitated asking the principal *"too many questions"*.

5.4.3 Advice about teaching

The principals also provided the beginning teachers with advice about teaching; however, the nature of this advice varied according to the strengths of each principal. Over the year, the principal of each school was asked to discuss the kind of support he or she gave the beginning teachers. From observations and from the reports of the beginning teachers it

[165] School reports are usually submitted to the DEB on the 14th of each month. These reports are prepared by the principal from the data provided by the teachers on the following 12 areas: (i) Enrolment at the beginning of the year; (ii) Number enrolled this month; (iii) Number who sat the monthly test; (iv) Number who passed the test; (v) Number who failed the test; (vi) Number of student-days in the month; (vii) Number of student-days in the month for females; (viii) Number of student-days lost to absences in the month; (ix) Number of student-days lost to absences in the month for females; (x) Number of student-days utilised in the month; (xi) Percentage of student-days in the month lost to absences (xii) Percentage of student-days in the month utilised.

was apparent that the principals tended to exaggerate the amount of support they gave, especially the number of times they observed teachers and gave feedback. In Bounyang's school, for example, the principal reported that he observed Bounyang teaching *"each month"* but when Bounyang was asked about this he claimed that he was observed, *"no more than three times in the year"*.

For three of the principals, observations appeared to be more a matter of formality than an opportunity to provide the new teacher with feedback about his or her teaching. As Bounyang's principal explained, his reason for observing Bounyang was that, *"it will make him more confident if the DEB comes and sees him"*. For this principal, observation was all about inspection rather than as a means whereby new teachers could receive genuine feedback. When asked whether he would agree for Bounyang to observe him teach he replied:

> *No, he has no right to observe me, only the DEB staff can observe me because when the DEB come to follow up teaching they sometimes observe me. The DEB considers me to be an academic advisor so there is no need for the other teachers to observe me. My role is to observe others and to give them advice.*
>
> (Sukumnoyi Village Principal: Visit 3. Interview 1)

Of the four principals, only the female principal who took over Seng's class when she was away, found out from first hand experience what the beginning teacher's students were like:

> *It was after teaching my students that the Principal was able to talk to me about my class - she could understand what I meant when I talked about the difficulties I had. She was able to give me some suggestions about how to manage them.*
>
> (Seng: Visit 3. Interview 4)

Although the reports were probably inflated, all principals claimed that they gave the beginning teachers explicit advice on how to run their classrooms. Three topics which principals frequently mentioned in this regard were how to organise group work, how to use activities, and how to make teaching aids. However, only Seng consistently reported that the advice the principal gave her was useful. For the others the advice their principals provided was seen as limited with few practical strategies about what to do - just instructions to complete the textbook lessons.

In some cases the beginning teachers also reported that the advice from the principal contradicted what they had learnt at the TTC. For example, Bounyang reported that after one of the few occasions when he was observed, the principal told him to let the students work in groups on their own. Bounyang explained that he did not agree with this advice as he had

been told at the TTC to work closely with the students and monitor their work to ensure they were on task. Similarly Khamxing, after being given advice by the principal to always write the text for the lesson on the board for the students to read, reported that after he tried a few times he stopped: *"it wasted time and made the students bored as they all had their own books which they could refer to"* (Khamxing: Visit 2. Interview 2). It appeared that the advice of scribing texts onto the board was one left over from the days when there was often only one book in the class and this meant that the teacher had to scribe so that all the students could read the text. All of the principals had taught for many years in very restricted circumstances and had not shifted their practices even though in their schools there were now enough textbooks in the main subjects for two students to share, and in some cases to have their own textbooks. However, these principals had had few opportunities for professional development about modern pedagogy. By the end of the year Bounyang's principal gave a more honest account of the kind of support which he was able to provide:[166]

> *I will tell you the truth - when I was a new teacher, fifteen years ago, there were not many tasks to do in the lesson. It's very different now to when I started teaching. In those days the only person who had a textbook was the teacher, so we had to write a lot on the board and talk a lot, but now there are textbooks and some teaching aids. We know we should try and use activities in the lesson but I don't know that many. Nowadays the relationships between the new teachers and students are better and the students can understand more easily as the teachers have learnt how to use teaching aids and other activities to help students learn.*
>
> (Sukumnoyi Village Principal: Visit 4. Interview 1)

On the whole the advice about teaching provided by principals, was not seen as all that helpful. The beginning teachers all said they preferred to ask other staff for advice. While they explained that they listened to the principal and sometimes tried the suggestions given, they often reverted to what they felt more comfortable with. In a final interview, when asked why they thought principals did not provide more advice about teaching, one of the beginning teachers suggested that *"the principals probably don't know themselves and don't have the answers"* (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 5).

[166] By the end of the year, when I was better known, the four principals were generally more forthcoming in their discussions with me.

5.4.4 Organising financial contributions from the community

The third kind of support which principals had the potential to provide was financial support for 'volunteer' teachers who were awaiting permanent appointments. This required the principal to approach the VEDC or, if it was not functioning, the Village Committee. From an examination of the way financial support was provided in the four schools, it appeared that the most effective way to ensure that school fees were paid was through the village authorities organising the collection.

In Seng's school the new principal, unlike her predecessor, approached the Village Committee to ask for financial support for the new teacher. While one payment was forthcoming the principal had to return again to ask for a second payment. In total, Seng received 400,000 kip (US$50) from the Village Committee for nine months teaching which paid for the petrol money to travel to work. Seng reported that *"without the principal's support I doubt whether I would have received any payment"* (Seng: Visit 4. Interview 1). In Bounyang's village, the principal did not have to intervene as the VEDC already had an established system for collection of school fees from each household. However, in Khamxing's case, the principal, while issuing instructions that the students should bring one kilogram of rice and 1,000 kip each month for the volunteer teachers, did not follow this up. It was left to the individual teachers to try to put pressure on their students to bring their 'donations'. To add further insult, during some months, the principal, rather than giving what money had been collected to the two volunteer teachers, spent it on school events such as the Developed Village Award ceremony. On another occasion it was reported that the money collected was spent on 'hospitality' for DEB visitors who came to invigilate at the end of semester exams. However, at Khamxing's school, as in other schools, the volunteer teachers could not be seen to complain. Perhaps this is what the principal had meant when he had told the staff to *"work together and have 'saamaki' "*- solidarity.

5.4.5 'Protection' from outsiders

While not all teachers received praise from the principal, they all appeared to receive a degree of 'protection'. There were occasions when the principal was confronted by outsiders (such as a representative from an NGO in a rare case, or more frequently by a government official) and it was important for the principal's own reputation that the teachers were seen to be doing their job, writing plans, teaching, undertaking monthly assessments. When the DEB came to visit Tiputai's school the principal made excuses for the teachers who had not completed lesson plans, saying they had been sick and busy with family matters. In

Bounyang's school the principal reported that the new teacher was *"doing a good job"*, although he never provided such encouragement to Bounyang himself. In similar fashion, when I approached Seng's principal about teaching strategies a beginning teacher might use, I was told that Seng was already confident and satisfactorily carrying out her work. However, the record below reveals another story:

> *It was my last day at the school and so I decided to ask the Principal whether she would allow me to show Seng how she could place her students in groups to complete tasks suited to their abilities. As soon as the Principal heard my suggestion for organising the students, she replied that Seng does this already and that I probably haven't seen her as I only come on some weeks. It is true that I am not always there, but I got the impression she was being protective of her staff and in a sense of herself. I felt like I was starting to intimidate her by asking too many questions which she could not answer so I stopped talking. After the meeting, I checked with Seng if she ever sits the students in ability groups. She shook her head saying 'no, of course not, you know I don't'. She laughed when I told her how the Principal had told me she that she did - but she also appeared happy to hear how the Principal had promoted her to the 'foreigner'.*
>
> (Salai Village: Visit 4. Journal Notes)

5.4.6 The influence of the principal on beginning teachers

Principals were seen to be highly influential. The beginning teachers knew that the principal had the authority to submit reports about them to the DEB and also to informally 'lobby' the DEB to make them permanent. Obviously it was important to get on with the principal. Towards the end of the school year the principals were asked to describe the qualities they thought important for a new teacher to possess and the criteria they would use to report on a new teacher to the DEB. Common criteria were: being punctual, working well with students, making plans, and keeping good records of the monthly learning results. There was no mention of good teaching, of helping students learn, of using activities, or that the new teacher was keen and asked questions about teaching problems. It seemed that judgements were being made, as one principal candidly explained, on the basis of the beginning teacher's *"punctuality, consistency and morals"*.

If the principal was absent working in the fields, as happened in two of the four schools, the new teachers did not dare to criticise. When the principal gave advice it was accepted passively. Principals were also seen to be instrumental in lobbying for financial support for the new teachers. However, with respect to advice, principals were mainly able to provide guidance on how to complete administrative tasks and sometimes even this responsibility was

delegated to other staff. In general there was little that could be called professional interaction between the beginning teacher and the principal.

5.5 Colleagues

Unlike teachers who work in urban areas in Laos, teachers in rural schools often work in their home village and are often related to the children they teach and to the staff with whom they work. This was the situation for the beginning teachers in the study. The three beginning teachers who taught in the village where they were born were related to many of their students and familiar with others. They knew their students' parents and they knew where they lived. Except for Bounyang, who was the first person in his village to train as a teacher, they also worked with relatives. Seng, who came from a neighbouring village to the one in which she worked, taught several nephews and nieces and also had a relative on staff.

Life in small communities is rarely private and news and rumours spread quickly.[167] During the day the teachers were a little cut-off from the adults in the community, but after-hours and at weekends they were just as immersed in the social, religious and cultural life of the village as anyone else. Communication between the staff therefore took place not only in the school but also in the village. The numerous festivals and ceremonies aided this process and also brought the teachers into contact with many of the parents. At school, during breaks, the teachers often got together and chatted. As the new teachers reported, topics were usually about 'village life'- or more accurately 'village gossip' - and sometimes about the students.

5.5.1 Communicating with other staff – asking for advice

The beginning teachers called on other staff for advice, in particular about how to compile the monthly test results as this was something they had not learnt in their pre-service course. While it was acceptable to ask questions about administration and reporting or about the content of textbook units, the new teachers said they did not feel comfortable asking questions about pedagogy. As Khamxing explained: *"If I ask too many questions they might think that I didn't learn anything in College so I just watch and see what the others are doing"* (Khamxing: Visit 1. Interview 2).

Tiputai ended her year disappointed that the teachers at her school were unable to provide her with more answers to the teaching problems she encountered. With ten teachers at her school she spoke of how she thought there would have been more practical advice:

[167] The four communities in the study ranged in size from approximately 950 to 1,850 people. See Table 5.1.

Everyone here talks about the monthly test results, but no one is really interested in talking about teaching. It's okay if I ask a question about something in the textbook, but often, when we are chatting, I ask a question about teaching and it is simply ignored.

(Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 1)

Even though three of the beginning teachers reported that other staff saw them as having learnt 'modern' teaching techniques at the TTC, the exchange of information between the beginning teachers and other staff appeared to flow mostly one-way. Only three instances were recorded of beginning teachers being asked to share ideas they had learnt in their pre-service course with other staff members. Tiputai was asked by the Grade 1 teacher how to use word cards to teach reading. The teacher had graduated in 1993 and in the 17 years since starting to work had attended only a single short in-service course. On another occasion Tiputai was asked by a teacher how to make and use an abacus. This was for a Grade 3 Maths unit which teachers found difficult to deliver. Khamxing reported being asked by the Grade 1 teacher to explain how he would teach addition to the 'slow learners' in his class. Apart from these three instances, there were no reports from beginning teachers of other staff seeking advice from them.

5.5.2 Observations of other staff

Observations of the teaching practices of colleagues were reported by the beginning teachers to be of more use to them than the limited advice they received about teaching techniques. In two of the schools there were no internal walls in the school and this facilitated informal observation of the teaching going on in neighbouring spaces. The beginning teachers all reported that they often took whatever opportunities they could to observe their colleagues as this enabled them to see typical teaching practices and to understand what was considered "acceptable". In the two schools that had doors, the teachers kept the classroom door shut, but on the whole there were plenty of opportunities for informal observation and most teachers did not seem to mind the beginning teachers walking past and looking in.

However, after two months of observing the other teachers, Seng reported that she did not agree with many of the teaching practices which she saw them using:

Every time I walk past the Grade 4 teacher's class I see her sitting down at her desk, letting students copy and do the exercises in their books. How can she know what they are doing? During teaching I don't leave my students alone - I talk to them and walk around the class – some of the students in Grade 4 can't even recite the consonants from the first one to the last one, so how can they read?

There are many things I would like to ask about how to help my students learn, but I don't see the others teaching any better than me!

(Seng: Visit 2. Interview 2)

After a year, Seng had concluded that there was little to learn about new teaching practices from observing the other teachers. She said she had realised that the other teachers let their students copy so that they could use the time to write up lesson plans or monthly test results. Towards the end of the year Tiputai turned to one teacher for advice. This was someone who she said she had observed trying to help her students learn. Like Seng, she, too, stated that she thought there was little to learn by copying the practices of the other teachers:

I think the other teachers at the school could have helped me more, not so much by giving me suggestions but by being better role models - they don't usually go to their classrooms and when they don't go I don't go either.

(Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 2)

In this case she was referring to the two Grade 1 teachers with whom she shared the 'hall'. If she went to her class she was expected to quieten the other two classes first and to do this she had to set the other two classes some work. If she was not feeling tired she would go first but as the year wore on, more often she waited for the other teachers to return to their classes before leaving the staffroom herself. Most teachers sat in the staffroom until well after the bell, with the teachers who taught the older grades sending the textbooks first with the class monitors, telling them to tell the rest of the class to start copying the lesson.

Bounyang also explained that he never observed any of the other three teachers in the school doing anything other than very traditional teaching. He reported that they scribed the textbook onto the board and expected their students to complete the exercises and to copy. They also called individuals out to the board where they had to either read or complete calculations while the rest of the class waited. As he had taught each of the classes when their usual teachers had been away, he knew the levels of the students in all of the five classes. He also knew that in each class there were students who could not read:

When we have staff meetings they are mainly about news from the DEB or about the statistics that we have to report. No one ever raises problems they are having in their classes. None of the other teachers usually say much. I would like to ask about how to teach reading but I am not brave enough.

(Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 2)

When asked why he was *"not brave enough"* he explained that as he was a beginning teacher without a lot of experience, he was frightened that he might say something wrong and so preferred for the time being, just to listen.

5.5.3 The influence of the staff on the beginning teachers

During the interviews many examples were collected of how the other teachers influenced the beginning teachers. Overall the staff encouraged the beginning teachers to become familiar with the tasks of 'being a teacher' - running the assembly, writing lesson plans, completing reports, teaching and 'getting through' the textbook. Their advice helped each of the new teachers understand the textbook content and showed them how to compile the monthly statistical reports, particularly the monthly test results. Observations of the teaching practices of the other teachers informed the new staff about what was acceptable. However, none of the beginning teachers reported seeing the learner-centred strategies which had been promoted in the TTC in use by other teachers.

By the end of the year, the beginning teachers reported that they had stopped asking the other staff about teaching because it became apparent that the others either did not want to talk about teaching or had no answers for them. But above all they said that they wanted to maintain good relations with the other staff. There were situations where being 'professional', and wanting to discuss the methods they had learnt in the TTC, were in conflict with 'getting on' with the staff. Each of them, in one way or another, expressed the sentiment that as volunteer teachers the most important thing was fostering harmony with the principal and the rest of the staff.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the pressures that impact on beginning teachers and which significantly influence their development as professionals. It began by describing activities and events in the village and then examined the various types of interactions which the beginning teachers typically had with village authorities, the DEB staff, the school principal and with other teachers. These contextual pressures provide the base from which a detailed examination of the beginning teachers' classroom practices can proceed. In the next chapter the teaching practices of the beginning teachers are described and the reasons for their adoption identified.

CHAPTER 6. TEACHING: AN EVOLVING PRACTICE

Teaching is one of the few careers in which the least experienced members face the greatest challenges and most responsibilities.

Brock and Grady, 1997, p. 11

6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter the contexts in which the beginning teachers worked were described.[168] This chapter now moves the study into the classroom. The experience of teaching, as reported by the beginning teachers and as observed by the researcher, becomes the focus. Five themes structure the chapter: (i) the administrative duties required of the beginning teachers for planning, assessment and reporting; (ii) the dominant classroom practices of the beginning teachers; (iii) their attempts to use learner-centred methods; (iv) their role in helping students learn; and, (v) drawing from the first four themes, the professional needs of beginning teachers. Examples of the challenges faced by the beginning teachers and the ways in which they attempted to overcome them are presented. Comparisons and contrasts are made across the four cases as well as within each case, with the aim being to assemble diachronic accounts that address the third and fourth research questions:

- *How do beginning teachers develop their professional practices?*
- *What are the professional needs of beginning teachers?*

The data presented was collected during the four week-long visits made to each of the beginning teachers.[169] Collection techniques[170] included journal records of significant school and classroom events kept by the beginning teachers, lesson observation records,[171] and transcriptions of formal and informal interviews.[172]

After a year of training the beginning teachers finally assumed responsibility for a class of their own. But the reception each received at their new school left much to be desired. None of the schools had any formal arrangements in place for orientating the beginning teachers and each had to rely on developing relationships with other staff in order to work out what was required. Over the year, all the beginning teachers experienced the same tension between 'compliance' and 'doing things differently'. This chapter explores that dichotomy.

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168 See Appendix 1 for the four case records that describe the contexts in which the beginning teachers worked.
169 See Appendix 4 for schedule of school visits.
170 See Table 3.4 and Section 3.5 for a description of the research techniques used.
171 Over the school year a total of 155 formal lessons were observed: 40 in Nakasan Village; 36 in Sukumnoyi Village; 37 in Nongsavanh Village; 42 in Salai Village. See Table 3.4.
172 See Table 3.5 for details of the formal and informal interviews held over the year.

6.1 Administrative Duties

When the beginning teachers spoke[173] about their communications with the principal in the first few days of the year, they all reported being directed to urgently undertake the tasks of planning and reporting.[174] Monthly, semester and yearly plans were required. Data for the monthly reports also had to be compiled. These plans and reports were required so that the principals could prepare their monthly reports to the District Education Bureaus (DEBs). The start of the school year then, was a time of considerable pressure with completion of the administrative tasks assigned as the top priority. To meet the requirements, all teachers started work on their plans as soon as the term commenced, and within two weeks testing also began, followed by reporting of the monthly statistics.[175] Such was the pressure felt by the beginning teachers that planning and reporting assumed prominence and by their own admission they occasionally undertook this work in the classroom during teaching time.

6.1.1 Long-term planning

Yearly planning involved distributing the textbook lessons the teacher was required to deliver across the 36-weeks of the school-year calendar. This task had not been discussed in the pre-service course and the beginning teachers reported finding it challenging. Once the yearly plans were complete they were displayed in the staffroom and then the teachers set about designing their semester and monthly plans by extracting them out of their yearly plan. Each beginning teacher reported being told that the plans were there to be followed carefully, and even though they were all familiar with how unscheduled events and activities punctuated the school year, they all stated that they started out believing that their plans realistically represented what they would cover over the year.

In their first few weeks, the teachers recorded in their journals that preparing the yearly plan was difficult. Consequently this task was explored during the interviews. Each teacher made similar comments – the teachers' guidebooks stipulated the number of hours for each lesson and guided the construction of the yearly plans, but they still had to ask colleagues for help. All four teachers reported getting help from either the principal or a colleague, usually through explanations, or in one case by being given previous plans to copy. When the other beginning teachers were asked why they did not copy they said that the teachers who had

[173] The first set of week-long visits and associated interviews took place during weeks 5 to 8 of the 2008/2009 school year.
[174] The strict reporting regime has its origins in the Lao Government's drive to achieve its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) targets by 2015.
[175] See Footnote 165 for a description of the areas of reporting.

taught their grades before had left or there were no plans on the wall. However, all of the beginning teachers reported that they could not make the plans just by following the teachers' guidebooks. Bounyang's explanation was typical:

> *The Principal told me to work through the teachers' guides and then to write the plans making sure they fitted around the mid-semester break, the exam weeks and the review weeks. I was thinking 'what about the other times when the school closes?' but I didn't say anything, I just followed his instructions. Then another teacher who had been at the school for a few years told me to watch how she was doing it. She just followed the number of lessons in the book and worked out how to squeeze them in. After a few weeks of teaching I realised I was going to fall behind and I didn't see how I would catch up. The important thing was to complete the plans in case the DEB staff came to visit.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 1. Interview 1)

Tiputai's principal suggested that in order to complete the textbooks she should shorten each lesson; however, Tiputai, along with the other three teachers, reported that they had to work out how to do this by themselves. By Semester 2, they each reported adopting similar strategies for cutting back the time. Mostly these involved cutting out the tasks in the teachers' guides and focusing on the main tasks set out in the textbook. Seng talked about one of her strategies for completing the Lao language lessons:

> *In each lesson I make them read the text and choose one exercise for them, then I let them copy it down. I don't tell them to make sentences from the new words or to read the sentences at the end of the text. If I did this I wouldn't get through the rest of the lessons.*
>
> (Seng: Visit 4. Interview 3)

During the final visits, the beginning teachers agreed that their original plans were unrealistic, and that writing them out and pasting them onto the staffroom wall was for appearance in case the DEB come to inspect. By the end of their first year none of the teachers felt they had genuinely completed the textbook and had only reached the end by glossing over activities and rushing through lessons.

Throughout the year, the beginning teachers often said they would like to teach more slowly but they remained worried about completing the required number of lessons. Without the pressure of 'getting through the textbook', teachers would have been able to work on the tasks suggested in the teachers' guides and to go at the students' pace, rather than having to shorten each lesson. During the end of year interviews, each teacher was asked about the number of Lao Language lessons which they would have ideally completed. For Grade 1

Language, Bounyang had 98 lessons he had to complete in the year but stated he would have preferred just to teach up to Lesson 50. Of the other three teachers, all of whom had to teach 66 Grade 3 Language lessons, Khamxing wanted to teach only up to Lesson 30, Tiputai to Lesson 47 and Seng to Lesson 50. Their rationale was that by teaching fewer lessons they could teach the content more thoroughly so that students could gain a better understanding of the material and develop associated skills before moving on. This pressure to complete the textbook had implications for student learning and this is further examined in Section 6.4.

6.1.2 Lesson plans

How to prepare lesson plans had been covered in the beginning teacher's pre-service course. However, unlike the practicum requirement that lesson plans were written prior to teaching, they were now written after the event as a form of *post hoc* reporting and used as evidence that lessons had been delivered. The beginning teachers were each instructed to have some lesson plans ready for inspection visits from the DEB. They admitted that while they started teaching believing that lesson plans had to be written before the lesson, within a few days they realised that this was neither necessary nor possible. In their first weeks, three of the teachers reported having to mind classes for others and the amount of time taken up teaching made it difficult for them to write out more than a few plans. These were normally written out after the lesson and kept as a record rather than used as a tool to guide teaching. Discussions with the beginning teachers, all of whom produced lesson plans that they had written up after the event for lessons which I had observed, showed that the plans did not correspond with what happened in class and were not even accurate records of lessons, but rather were plans modelled on the suggestions for the lessons in the teachers' guides.

From my own observations and from the reports of the teachers, it was common practice to prepare lesson plans during class time. Seng noted in her journal how she often saw some of her colleagues in class writing out their plans while their students copied work. Using class time in this way was a practice that was generally accepted by many staff. When asked what their views about this were, two of the beginning teachers said it was *"unprofessional";* however, as reflected in Seng's comments, this may have been more to do with not being able to maintain control as well as not wanting to ignore the students:

> *Sometimes the other teachers spend time writing out their lesson plans while their students are copying from the board. That's why I think they can write so many lesson plans, but I know if I do this, my students will misbehave.*
>
> (Seng: Visit 2. Interview 2)

From interviews with the beginning teachers and discussions with other teachers, it became apparent that lesson plans were viewed as a record to present during any inspection, rather than as a tool to guide teaching. Several experienced teachers discussed how a stock of lesson plans could be kept in teaching portfolios as evidence of merit. In 2008, the Ministry of Education's (MoE) Department of Personnel published the criteria to be met to obtain the new Teacher's Award. This included the criterion: *"any applicant should have at least a semester's worth of lesson plans for each of the eight subjects taught in the primary school"* (MoE: 2008b). In practice this meant that a teacher in Grade 3 would have to complete over 100 lesson plans to be eligible. Several teachers said this was a difficult task which could be completed only by working at the same grade level for a few years.

6.1.3 Monthly reports

Compiling the monthly reports and submitting these to the DEB was a task which dominated the life of the school. The journal notes from my third visit to Tiputai's school read:

> *Several times this week the Deputy Principal has called all the teachers to the staff-room so they can work together on the monthly statistics. Meanwhile the students have been copying work set for them from the board. The Deputy Principal informed the teachers that she will take everyone's reports to the DEB on Friday.*
>
> (Nongsavanh Village: Visit 3. Journal Notes)

Interviews with the other beginning teachers confirmed that similar scenes were played out in their schools. They too reported that apart from drawing up yearly plans, the preparation of monthly reports was the most difficult task they encountered during their first few weeks after starting work. The main reason for this, they said, was that they had not learnt the tasks during their Teacher Training College (TTC) course or on practicum and had to rely on other teachers for help.[176] The importance this task was accorded meant that the new teachers had to quickly learn how to undertake this work. By the seventh week of term each of the beginning teachers had completed two sets of monthly reports, the first being handed in just three weeks after starting work. Perhaps, because it was in the principal's interest to get the reports to the DEB on time, this was one area where all the teachers reported receiving help from the other staff, including the principal, when needed. Thus, although listed by the

[176] As reported in Chapter 4 practicum was focused on writing lesson plans and teaching, not on administrative work. These latter tasks, which could not easily be handed over, continued to be undertaken by the cooperating teachers.

beginning teachers in their journals in the first few weeks as a major difficulty, by Week 8 each teacher regarded producing these reports on time as a key achievement.

6.1.4 Student tests

Monthly and end-of-year reporting involved assembling data on student progress using tests that each teacher had to set and administer. Thus, ascertaining student progress involved a regular investment in time and energy. For two of the beginning teachers this meant assessing progress in all eight subjects, while the other two beginning teachers were required to test the students in only the three major subjects of Language, Mathematics, and the World Around Us and to give marks for the other five subjects based on informal observations. Individual test results were not reported, only tallies of the results, specifically 'the number of students attending the test', 'the number and percentage of students who passed the test', and 'the number and percentage of students who failed the test'.

All of the beginning teachers recorded in their journals that they were experiencing difficulties with one or more of the processes of preparing tests, administering them, marking them and calculating the results. They reported that in their TTC course they had learnt about various types of assessment but not about designing and marking classroom tests. It was not until these issues were discussed during the interviews, that the extent of their difficulties became apparent.

(i) Managing test schedules

Each of the schools scheduled a 'test-week' every month, and immediately before and during this period the routine of teaching the textbook lessons changed. The beginning teachers were advised by colleagues to schedule tests across a full week and *"to encourage better attendance"*. Before the 'test-week', teachers reminded their students to come to school so as to be able to take the test. It was considered important that the teacher get the children to attend during those times. During my first visit to Salai School, Seng was observed on her motorbike going to a student's house to pick him up so he could attend the Language test. Three of the four beginning teachers recorded in their journals that non-attendance by students during the test-week was a major problem as it caused much more work if students had to then take the test later during break or lunchtime.

(ii) Designing and marking monthly tests

None of the teachers recalled learning in their pre-service course how to design tests. Rather, it was just something that they were expected to know. Another difficulty which the

beginning teachers talked about was how to test students who could neither read nor write. Khamxing explained that after talking to the Grade 4/5 teacher he worked out a way to test children who were unable to read or write fluently enough to answer the questions for the World Around Us subject:

> *I give them a test according to their abilities. I give the stronger students five questions to answer and the weaker students only three. I call the students to the board one-by-one and ask them questions while the others are working. If they get all the answers correct then I give them full marks regardless of how many questions they answer.*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 2. Interview 2)

Assigning marks and finalising scores presented an ongoing challenge for the beginning teachers. Comments made during interviews revealed the inventive ways which teachers approached the task of marking. For example, one particular month Tiputai explained how she would assess ability in Handicrafts by giving a high mark *"to the students who bring in bamboo for the fence we are making"* (Tiputai: Visit 2. Journal Notes). All of the beginning teachers reported giving additional marks if the student was *'good'* or if the student had been listening during lessons. Khamxing said he increased marks to encourage his students: *"the lowest assessment mark I used to give for maths was 4 out of 10 but no one likes getting 4 so now the lowest mark I give is 5"* (Khamxing: Visit 4. Interview 4). Tiputai attributed the higher grades her students achieved by the fourth month of teaching to be the result of her reviewing the test content before the exam as well as her practice of giving weaker students additional marks for *'trying'*.

(iii) <u>*Organising end-of-semester and end-of-year test reports*</u>

Although, after the first two months, each of the beginning teachers recorded in their journals that they were pleased they had learnt how to report monthly test results, the task of constructing end-of-semester and end-of-year reports was more complicated and considered difficult by the four teachers. Seng recounted the advice given towards the end of the year:

> *The end-of-the-year task of reporting is more complicated. At first I didn't think it would be so difficult - I thought it would be like doing the monthly tests, but what we have to calculate is the average for each student for each of the eight subjects over the last 4 months. When I tried to do this I felt so confused. I sat in the room trying to do it but after awhile I couldn't stand it and I talked to the other teachers who were outside. They suggested I not give the students the real marks but give them the mark that I think they should get. They don't give the real scores because they can't stand it either - doing it one-by-one for 30 students or more for each*

subject made them tired. They said that as I taught my students every day I should know what they can do and therefore I should have the confidence to 'give' them the score which I think they should have. So now I have to think: 'will I give them the real mark or will I just make it up?'

(Seng: Visit 4. Interview 1)

By the end of the first year of teaching, the four beginning teachers reported having learnt either directly or indirectly from their colleagues, about what Seng called *"kanen pi"* or 'ghost marks'. These were marks which the teachers assigned on the basis of general feelings rather than from any objective criteria linked to homework, class exercises or monthly tests. As above, Seng reported that senior teachers explicitly suggested this to her while the other three beginning teachers also reported learning this approach by observing and chatting with their colleagues.

(iv) Reporting test scores

At different stages in the year, each of the beginning teachers spoke of feeling pressured to boost scores and to increase the number of students who were reported as passing. For example, Tiputai spoke of how she had been told in staff meetings that each teacher should aim to have very few students achieving low marks in the monthly tests. However, although acceding to the pressure to boost the scores, Tiputai still had reservations about the practice:

No one ever talks about how to help the weak students - just to report on what I think is happening and not to rely on the real results. I just have to report that most students are going okay and show that most students are progressing. So even though there are about ten students who can't read, if I write that there are four or five then that's okay. So long as I write that most are okay, no one says anything.

(Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 3)

When Seng commenced teaching her Grade 3 class of 30 students she found that 8 students could not read at all and another 10 or 11 students could read no more than a few simple words. Three months later she described the pressure she was feeling regarding the reporting of the monthly scores:

I was asked to increase the grade scores because when they sent the monthly test results to the DEB, the patterns in the other classes were very different. In the other classes there is a higher percentage of above average students who passed the tests and the teachers said I have to increase the scores because if the learning results are too low it will reflect on my work. But I don't want to increase the scores as I think 'this is what the students can do'. If I increase their marks I worry about what will happen if they go to another class and they can't do the work. Then the other teachers will talk about me. I think that when you are a teacher you shouldn't just think about your own future but you should think about your students.

(Seng: Visit 2. Interview 3)

As seen, Seng did not feel comfortable with the idea that scores could be adjusted and initially resisted the pressure to report inflated pass rates. However, after a few more months, she, too, adopted strategies to boost her students' test scores. These included teaching the material in the test and rewarding students with marks for participation in class or for doing homework. Khamxing also reported that in the first couple of months he had been encouraged by the principal to increase the test scores for the students in his class. He explained that he learnt from the other teachers how to do this so that the scores were acceptable to the principal and ready to report to the DEB. Bounyang was more reluctant to talk about such practices. He spoke briefly at the beginning of the year and made similar comments to those heard from the others; however, he was reluctant to discuss these issues in detail.

6.1.5 Summary

By the end of the year the beginning teachers had successfully met the challenge of undertaking the required administrative tasks. Reporting was a priority and failure to complete the relevant tasks on time could cause problems not only for individuals but also for the school. The principals therefore, who had to report to 'district' and 'higher authorities',[177] took steps to ensure that each teacher complied with the administrative requirements.

[177] The 'higher authorities' often alluded to are the staff in the Provincial Education Services and ultimately staff in the Ministry of Education.

6.2 Four Dominant Classroom Practices

Once the beginning teachers had satisfied the administrative requirements they were free to concentrate on their teaching. In total, 275 hours were spent by the research team observing the four teachers at work in or around classrooms. 181 hours were spent formally observing and recording 155 lessons, while another 94 hours were spent either inside the classroom observing activities such as taking the roll, reciting tables, singing, playing games to 'settle' the class, packing up and finalising homework, or outside the classroom observing assemblies, flag raising ceremonies, daily exercises, dancing and gardening.[178] A breakdown of the 155 lessons according to subject and teacher is provided in Table 6.1 below. Sub-totals are given for the number of core subject lessons and non-core subject lessons. For each lesson a running record[179] was kept and later used as the basis for the analysis of the classroom practices discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Table 6.1: Number of observed lessons by subject area and teacher

Subjects	Number of Lessons Observed				
	Bounyang	Tiputai	Khamxing	Seng	Total
Core subjects					
Lao Language	16	11	13	14	54
Mathematics	15	13	15	15	58
World Around Us	5	4	5	5	19
Sub-total	**36**	**28**	**33**	**34**	**131**
Non-Core Subjects					
Handicraft	1	3	1	3	8
Sport	2	2	1	2	7
Drawing	1	0	1	0	2
Singing	0	3	1	3	7
Sub-total	**4**	**8**	**4**	**8**	**24**
TOTAL	**40**	**36**	**37**	**42**	**155**

NOTE: 1. World Around Us includes 'Moral Education' which is taught as a separate subject in Grades 3 to 5

While there was no overarching document to guide the teachers, the subject textbooks included everything that had to be taught, and were, in effect, the curriculum. An official time allocation for each subject, determined at the national level, was conveyed to the schools by the DEBs. For each of the five grades of primary school each subject area had its own student textbook and an accompanying teachers' guide. The delivery over the year of the textbook

[178] Although Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3 lessons are ostensibly 35 minutes long and Grade 4 and Grade 5 lessons are 40 minutes long, virtually all lessons observed ran over their time allocation by 50% or more.

[179] An example of a running record is provided in Appendix 7.

units for the grade was a base requirement for all staff. Unlike many in rural schools in Laos, the four beginning teachers all had access to a workable number of textbooks for the core subjects, even though in some cases students had to share, with two students to a book being typical.[180] For the non-core subjects the teachers had access to the teachers' guides and to a few copies of the textbooks, which they rarely gave out to the students.

This section of the chapter examines the most common teaching practices used by the beginning teachers and draws on the running records to illustrate the ways in which the teachers (i) provided explanations; (ii) questioned students; (iii) organised students to copy down work; and, (iv) called students out to the board. As these four topics are examined, the difficulties which the beginning teachers experienced in the classroom are identified.

6.2.1 Providing explanations

The four beginning teachers all spent a considerable proportion of their lessons talking. Typically lessons began with a review of previous work or the introduction of new material through the use of closed questions, with monologues used to give instructions or to explain a concept.

Table 6.2: Number and percentage of observed core subject lessons in which beginning teachers included 10 minutes or more of explanations.

Teacher	Number of core subject lessons observed				Number of core subject lessons observed with 10 minutes or more of explanations				Percentage of core subject lessons observed with 10 minutes or more of explanations			
	LL	Math	WAU	**All**	LL	Math	WAU	**All**	LL	Math	WAU	**All**
Bounyang	16	15	5	**36**	6	14	3	**23**	38%	93%	60%	**64%**
Tiputai	11	13	4	**28**	5	11	2	**18**	45%	85%	50%	**64%**
Khamxing	13	15	5	**33**	1	11	2	**14**	8%	73%	40%	**42%**
Seng	14	15	5	**34**	3	11	2	**16**	23%	73%	40%	**47%**
Total	**54**	**58**	**19**	**131**	**15**	**47**	**9**	**71**	**28%**	**81%**	**47%**	**54%**

NOTE: LL=Lao Language; Math=Mathematics; WAU= World Around Us

Table 6.2 above shows the percentage of lessons in the three core subjects where the teachers spent a sustained period of ten minutes or more, and sometimes up to twenty minutes, delivering monologues. About a quarter of the observed Lao Language lessons, just

[180] Benveniste *et al*., (2008) report that while 67% of students in Lao primary schools had their own Lao Language textbook only 6% of students had their own mathematics textbook with even lower ownership numbers for other subjects. Most textbooks were shared.

under half of the World Around Us (WAU) lessons and over three quarters of the Mathematics lessons included one or more extended periods of 'teacher talk'.

When explanations occurred at the beginning of a lesson they were given to introduce a topic and generally appeared to be pre-planned. However, when the talk occurred in the middle or towards the end of a lesson, this was usually given in response to a perceived problem the students were having. In mathematics lessons lengthy explanations often came at both the start as well as during the lesson. In WAU lessons monologues often followed on after the teacher had commenced the lesson with questions.

Although lengthy 'teacher talk' was common, there were also situations when *more* talk could have been beneficial. An examination of the running records of the 54 Language lessons observed suggests that some opportunities for learning were lost *because* of a lack of teacher explanation. For example, a common Language textbook exercise involved asking students to make their own sentences using new words but this task was rarely set. Even though it seems a simple task to explain to the students, the beginning teachers all reported that they were unconfident teaching how to do this and instead typically retreated to the safe haven of getting students to copy sentences from the textbook. The extract from a running record reproduced below, gives an example of how, with no explanation provided by the teacher, the lesson morphs into an exercise in copying.

Teacher:	*tells students to open their notebooks and that they are going to write sentences using words she will write on the board.*
Teacher:	*writes the word "good" on the board and asks the class to give an example of a sentence with the word "good" in it.*
Students:	*three or four students call out the example given in the textbook which uses the word "good".*
Teacher:	*acknowledges the answer and writes the sentence from the textbook on the board.*
Teacher:	*writes four more words on the board and tells students to write their own sentences.*
Students:	*most are quiet and read the text in pairs trying to find examples of the word in the textbook.*
Teacher:	*walks around the class and when she sees that no one has written their own sentences, she gives out more textbooks and lets them copy sentences from the book.*

(Seng: Visit 3. Language Lesson. Running Record #42)

(i) Supported explanations

During lessons in which explanations were used to introduce a topic, the beginning teachers sometimes used concrete materials or teaching aids to illustrate a point, such as chopsticks for counting or some word cards for Language.[181] Apart from maps of Laos, a few wooden shapes in Khamxing's school, a box of old story books in Tiputai's school and a UNICEF 'Blue Box'[182] in three of the four schools, there were few other resources. If teachers wanted to use aids they had to prepare them and bring them from home. However, during the planting and harvesting seasons, teachers claimed they had no time to prepare materials and the blackboard was their only teaching tool.

Table 6.3: Number and percentage of observed core subject lessons in which beginning teachers included 10 minutes or more of explanations and also supported the lesson through the use of teaching aids or the blackboard or both.

Teacher	Number of core subject lessons observed with 10 minutes or more of explanations				Number/Percentage of core subject lessons observed which had 10 mins or more of explanations and **supported by teaching aids**				Number/Percentage of core subject lessons observed which had 10 mins or more of explanations and **supported by the blackboard**			
	LL	Math	WAU	**All**	LL	Math	WAU	**All**	LL	Math	WAU	**All**
Bounyang	6	14	3	**23**	1/17%	6/43%	0/0%	**7/30%**	4/67%	14/100%	1/33%	**19/83%**
Tiputai	5	11	2	**18**	1/20%	2/18%	2/100%	**5/28%**	3/60%	11/100%	1/50%	**15/83%**
Khamxing	1	11	2	**14**	0/0%	5/46%	2/100%	**7/50%**	0/0%	11/100%	2/100%	**13/91%**
Seng	3	11	2	**16**	2/66%	1/9%	0/0%	**3/19%**	2/67%	11/100%	2/100%	**15/94%**
Total	**15**	**47**	**9**	**71**	**4/27%**	**14/30%**	**4/44%**	**22/31%**	**9/60%**	**47/100%**	**6/67%**	**62/87%**

NOTE: LL=Lao Language; Math=Mathematics; WAU=World Around Us

Table 6.3 above shows the percentage of observed lessons in the three core subjects in which lengthy explanations were supported by either teaching aids or the use of the blackboard or both. As shown, the blackboard was used on average in 87% of lessons while teaching aids were used in only 31% of the 71 lessons which involved long explanations. Unlike lessons which used teaching aids and therefore required a degree of planning, explanations on the board were either planned or given as responses within an evolving lesson.

(ii) Limitations of explanations

The most common problem observed when the teachers gave lengthy explanations was that the students lost interest and the teachers lost control. This was less the case with Tiputai,

[181] The use of teaching aids and concrete materials is explored further in Section 6.3.

[182] The UNICEF "Blue Box" was a one-off basic resource kit distributed to many primary schools in Laos.

who, even with a class of 70 Grade 3 students, generally kept their attention by using a variety of management strategies which included the use of eye contact, moving around the room, distributing questions across the class and waiting till the class was quiet before talking. However, Khamxing and Seng, with 31 and 36 Grade 3 students respectively, often appeared not to notice when the students had 'turned off' and only stopped talking when the noise level made it difficult to hear. A primary reason for the problem was that these teachers nearly always directed their attention only to students at the front of the room or those who had been called to the blackboard. Bounyang, with 61 Grade 1 students, attempted to retain control by making students put their hands on their heads; however, this was used so frequently, and rarely varied, that it became an ineffective ritual. The main problem though, was that too many of the explanations turned into mini-lectures more suited to the attention span of adults. Many of the explanations were simply not heard by the students. All the beginning teachers, including Tiputai, would have benefited from advice about classroom management.

6.2.2 The use of questioning

Regardless of the subject all the beginning teachers, usually commenced their lessons by asking questions. The standard pattern for a lesson, as set out in the teachers' guides,[183] was that the first part of every lesson would be a *"review of previous learning"*, and questioning, according to the beginning teachers, seemed to them to be a *"natural"* way to accommodate this. Questioning was also commonly used to introduce new topics, particularly in the World Around Us and Moral Education subjects. However, the questions that the beginning teachers used were those that were listed in the textbook. This tendency, at least initially, not to depart from the safety of the textbook was underlined by Bounyang during an interview: *"As new teachers, if we focus on our own ideas it might not be good as I am not confident that they are correct. We have to follow the textbook until we get some experience"* (Bounyang: Visit 3. Interview 3).

(i) Types of questions

Because of the high dependence on the textbook, a review was undertaken of the Grade 3 Language and the Grade 3 World Around Us lessons to determine the types of questions which were listed in the textbooks. As shown in Table 6.4, 83% of the textbook questions require students to recall information that can be found in the body of the lesson ('text-recall'

[183] In the standard lesson plan format outline in the teacher's guides the four key stages are: (i) review of previous lesson; (ii) introduction of new lesson; (iii) main body of lesson; and, (iv) lesson evaluation.

questions) and only 17% that require the student to go beyond the textbook for the answer ('beyond-the-text' questions).

Table 6.4: Number and percentage of 'text-recall' and 'beyond-the-text' questions listed in Lao Language and World Around Us Grade 3 textbook lessons

Grade 3 Textbook	Number of Lessons	Number of Questions	Lessons asking 'text-recall' questions		Lessons asking 'beyond-the-text' questions	
			Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Lao Language	66	184	154	84%	30	16%
World Around Us	33	96	79	82%	17	18%
Total	**99**	**280**	**233**	**83%**	**47**	**17%**

NOTE: 'text-recall' questions require students to recall information from the body of the lesson
'beyond-the-text' questions require the student to go beyond the textbook for the answer

In order to understand the types of questions being asked by the beginning teachers, an analysis of the running records of the 155 formally observed lessons was undertaken. Two types of questions were considered – those which required students to recall material found within the textbook ('text-recall' questions) and those which required the students to examine their own lives or experiences in order to answer the question ('life-experience' questions). The analysis recorded which types of question had been used at least once in a lesson (rather than the total number of times such questions occurred in a lesson). The results, given in Table 6.5, show that in 138 of the 155 lessons observed (89%) one or more 'text-recall' questions were asked while in only 26 of the lessons (17%) were one or more 'life-experience' questions asked. It is also interesting to note that the frequency with which each type of question was used at least once in a lesson was very similar for all four teachers.

Table 6.5: Number and percentage of lessons observed in which beginning teachers used 'text-recall' questions or 'life-experience' questions or both

Beginning Teacher	Total Number of Lessons Observed	Lessons in which 'text-recall' questions were used		Lessons in which 'life-experience' questions were used	
		Number of lessons	Percentage of total lessons	Number of lessons	Percentage of total lessons
Bounyang	40	36	90%	7	17%
Tiputai	36	32	88%	6	16%
Khamxing	37	34	91%	6	16%
Seng	42	36	85%	7	16%
Total	**155**	**138**	**89%**	**26**	**17%**

NOTE: 'text-recall' questions require students to recall material found within the textbook
'life-experience' questions require students to examine their own lives in order to answer the question

(ii) Textbook questions

Staying close to the prepared questions, which mostly required answers from the textbook, made teaching predictable. In this sense, the teachers knew the answers they wanted and asked questions until they received those answers. The running record #14 of a Lao Language lesson, delivered by Seng, shows that even seemingly open questions from the textbook: *"What do you do before you go to school in the mornings?"* were in practice treated as a closed question because the teacher sought the 'correct' answers supplied in the textbook. In this lesson, the teacher accepted a few answers from students about their actual lives but then directed the class back to the textbook and had them read out the textbook answers. No attempt was made to talk to the students about their own answers - *"watch TV", "make a fire"* - because they were different from the answers in the textbook.

(iii) Higher order questions

Using questions to scaffold learning by 'prompting' and 'probing' was rarely observed and not well managed by the beginning teachers. For example, they seemed unable to prompt students who could not initially answer a question. Instead they tended to ignore incorrect answers and would answer their own questions themselves, usually adding *"Is that right?"* or *"Do you agree?"* This questioning style was commonly used in World Around Us and Moral Education lessons. The following extract from the running record of a Grade 1 World Around Us lesson illustrates the point:

Teacher:	*Bounyang asks "What are living things?" Some children are still talking and so he repeats the question "What are living things?"*
Students:	*One student calls out "Big trees" Another calls out, "small flowers".*
Teacher:	*Bounyang replies "Yes", then repeats the question again: "What are living things?"*
Students:	*No one answers.*
Teacher:	*Bounyang repeats the question for a fourth time and then starts to give an answer which turns into a short talk explaining that living things grow - some grow on land, some grow in the water. He then pauses and asks the whole class "Is that right?"*
Students:	*Most of the students call out in unison "Yes".*

(Bounyang: Visit 3. World Around Us Lesson. Running Record #25)

When students gave responses that deviated from the anticipated answer, the beginning teachers were faced with the problem of how to deal with these comments. A common reaction was to simply ignore such answers. The main reason given by the beginning teachers

for this approach was that they said they constantly felt under pressure to get through the lessons and catch up to their plans to deliver all the textbook lessons in the year. There was, they contended, no time to follow up issues or ideas raised by the students.

Although the large majority of the 155 observed lessons were delivered in a restrictive 'follow-the-textbook' manner, there were occasions when the lessons seemed to flow more naturally. About 10 such instances were seen and in all cases this happened when the textbook topic was particularly relevant to the students' lives, and the teachers themselves appeared to become caught up in the topic as they listened to their students and responded to them. The extract from a running record reproduced below illustrates this:

Teacher: *"When you go to the fields do you ever see bombs?"*

Students: *Many students call out "Yes"*

Teacher: *"What do they look like?"*

Students: *"They are small" "Round, "Long".*

Teacher: *"What should you do when you see one?"*

Students: *"Tell your parents" "Don't touch it?"*

Teacher: *"Do you all do that? Or do some of you touch them?"*

Students: *Most students call out "No". One student calls out "The men told us to leave them alone" (referring to the bomb disposal workers who had visited the village to talk about unexploded ordnances)*

Teacher: *"What else did they tell you?"*

Similar free flowing questioning continues for another few minutes before Bounyang writes four words from the lesson on the blackboard for the students to read and copy into their books.

(Bounyang: Visit 4. Language Lesson. Running Record #71)

(iv) <u>Questioning and classroom management</u>

One of the obvious weaknesses in lesson delivery that was observed was the tendency of all of the beginning teachers to concentrate their attention and questioning on one or two groups to the detriment of the remainder of the class. In general the groups the teachers tended to select to answer questions were more capable students who could be relied on to provide the correct answer, students who misbehaved, and students who tended to be quiet but who were also 'struggling'. The patterns were particularly evident in lessons delivered by Seng and Khamxing who both persisted in talking mainly to disruptive boys who sat up the front of the class, rarely asking other students who did try to listen.

A common technique used by the beginning teachers in an effort to manage classroom behaviour and to engage students was to draw attention to an individual, particularly to someone who had not been listening, and so 'shame' him or her. Often a question would be directed to a non-attentive student knowing that the child could not answer correctly and then the child would be rebuked or made fun of in front of the class. However, for students who simply struggled with the work, 'shaming' was used less often, particularly by Bounyang and Tiputai. They believed in asking the 'weaker' students questions, but in a supportive manner to encourage them to participate, although this brought with it the problem of slowing the lesson down and the risk that they would lose the attention of other students. At no stage were any of the beginning teachers seen administering any form of corporal punishment, a practice which although under the Education Law was outlawed in Lao schools.[184] However, the beginning teachers did report it being administered in mild forms (tweaking ears, rapping hands) by colleagues in neighbouring classrooms. In the final interviews, the beginning teachers confirmed that no systematic training was given to them during their TTC course on alternative forms of discipline.

Classroom observations showed that maintaining student participation during question times remained a challenge for the teachers throughout the year. It was especially difficult because teaching revolved mainly around the whole class rather than smaller groups. The only strategy observed was teachers promising the 'weaker' and 'disruptive' students additional marks for their monthly tests to encourage them to participate. The teachers believed this was an effective technique for encouraging participation and recalled the approach being used by their own teachers when they were students at school as well as by other colleagues.

(v) Limitations of questioning

The beginning teachers all had a narrow understanding of question types and of strategies for using scaffolding to help students answer questions. While each teacher reported learning a little about questioning in their course, no one reported asking their colleagues about questioning techniques. When Tiputai was asked to explain how other teachers in her school questioned their students, she said she thought they did the same as her and "*followed the textbook questions"*. Initially each of the teachers were observed following the textbook questions and appeared reluctant to deviate from them, explaining that they were *"unsure"*

[184] Article 49 of the *Education Law 2007* (GoL, 2007) states: "*The prohibitions for teachers are as below: 1. Batter, insult, ill-treat, and be not fair with learners."* Corporal punishment is also considered unlawful under Article 27 of the *Act on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children*, which confirms the state's policy to create "*child-friendly"* schools in which students are protected from corporal punishment (GoL, 2006b).

whether their own questions *"would be correct"*. Towards the end of the year, they reported learning themselves to provide concrete examples in maths questions and to be more flexible in the World Around Us lessons. However, at no stage did they appear to understand the many purposes to which skilful questioning could be put, nor did they appear to be aware of the bias in all the textbooks towards 'text-recall' questions.

6.2.3 Copying

One of the main teaching strategies employed by the four teachers was to have the students copy from the board or from the textbooks. During the interviews the teachers all claimed that copying was the most efficient way of ensuring that the content of the textbook was faithfully delivered, and as the year progressed the teachers all used copying more frequently. Copying sums from the maths textbooks (often with the answers) and copying texts from the Language textbooks were familiar tasks. Copying the text so that students could practice reading at home was given as a further justification for the practice, even where the students were allowed to take their textbooks home. Copying was also used as a management tool - teachers faced with restless students often resorted to a copying task for the purpose of settling the class.

During the interviews, Tiputai, Khamxing, and Seng each raised the question of whether they should scribe the material to be copied onto the board first, or whether they should just let the students copy from the textbook. Although they acknowledged that scribing the text onto the board took time, they argued that it had the advantage of allowing them to keep control of what the students were reading, and allowed them to point to specific parts of the text and ask questions about it. By the time of the first interviews Khamxing had abandoned scribing textbook passages on the board and let his students copy directly from their books. He explained that it made his teaching easier because the students were engaged and did not have to wait for him to scribe. However, a few weeks later he reported that the principal advised him not to let his students copy directly from the books and to put the text on the board. The principal reiterated this point during an interview:

> *In previous years it was hard. Sometimes there was only one textbook for the teacher and none for the students so the teachers had to first scribe the text onto the board. Today teachers have it easy because now they can get students to copy from the books but I still tell them to put the work on the board because it's a better way to teach and easier to control the class.*
>
> (Nakasan Village Principal: Visit 2. Interview 1)

Nonetheless by the third visit Khamxing admitted that while he had followed the principal's advice for a month, he later changed to writing short texts on the board as his students told him they did not like waiting. Khamxing did not appear to understand that he could get his students to copy the work at the same time as he scribed. His approach is illustrated in the extract from the running record reproduced below:

Teacher:	*Khamxing tells his students to get their books out to copy but doesn't check that this is happening. He mostly keeps his back to the class, occasionally turning around and telling them to start.*
Students:	*Of the 27 students who are present only four are copying into their books while the rest are playing at their tables and quietly chatting.*
Teacher:	*After 20 minutes Khamxing finishes scribing. He turns around telling everyone to look at the board and to read together.*
Students:	*The announcement brings everyone's attention to the board. Only 10 students have copied anything down.*
Teacher:	*Khamxing starts to read and the students follow.*

(Khamxing: Visit 4. Language Lesson. Running Record #62)

For Bounyang, with his Grade 1 class, Language texts were generally only a few words long, so scribing onto the board took very little time and he always followed this practice. For Seng and Tiputai, scribing onto the board was also their preferred approach. However, they also said they did not like students sitting and waiting, so initially scribing occurred only when they came to school early and prepared the board before school started, but by the second semester both teachers had started to write the text up during class time. At one point Seng stopped scribing and let the students copy from the textbook, but when she realised that some students were racing ahead and copying out lessons she was yet to teach, she reverted to putting the text on the board. Both Seng, with her class of 31 students, and especially Tiputai with her class of 70 students, believed that by having the text on the board they could focus on individual students and more readily keep control of the class:

> *If I have them reading their books they don't really look at the words - they just chant - but when I put the text on the board, they can see exactly what words they are supposed to be reading and it is easier for me to check that they are not just memorising the words.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 2. Interview 1)

Similarly, Seng stated that by having the Language text on the board she could guide the reading of her small group of unruly boys. Both Seng and Tiputai regularly checked that each of the students were copying while they scribed. This avoided the problem of the class getting restless while they waited for the teacher to finish and also limited the problem experienced by Khamxing above, of finding out that although the teacher had finished scribing, few students had actually copied the text down.

Observations of 131 core subject lessons (see Table 6.6) revealed that copying text or mathematics exercises from the textbook or the board occurred in most lessons, and in a high proportion of them (77%), a quarter or more of the time was spent copying. It was not uncommon for entire lessons to consist of little other than copying. Khamxing, who took on responsibility for a second class in the latter part of the year, could perhaps be excused for spending most of his time shuttling between the two classrooms and organising the students to copy from the board or from the textbook.

Table 6.6: Number and percentage of observed core subject lessons in which beginning teachers used copying text or calculations for a quarter or more of the lesson

Teachers	Number of core subject lessons observed	Core subject lessons observed where a quarter or more of the lesson time was spent copying text or calculations	
		Number of lessons	Percentage of lessons
Bounyang	36	23	64%
Tiputai	28	21	75%
Khamxing	33	27	82%
Seng	34	30	88%
Total	**131**	**101**	**77%**

As the year progressed, particularly towards the end-of-semester exams, teachers tended to assign greater proportions of each lesson to copying. However, to make students complete what were essentially mind-numbing tasks, the teachers needed strategies to keep their students quiet and focused. While Seng, Tiputai and Khamxing often threatened to make noisy students run around the school, for many of the boys this was more a reward than a punishment. The only other commonly observed behaviour management strategy was to award marks to students who finished first or who copied quietly. Both strategies are reflected in the following extract from a running record of a Grade 3 Language lesson:

Teacher:	*Seng writes out the text on the board which outlines the steps involved in washing dishes (about 100 words). She tells the class to copy it down.*
Students:	*Some of the boys ignore her and continue to fiddle.*
Teacher:	*Seng shouts at the boys calling them by name and threatening to make them run around the school if they do not finish. She tells the class that those who work well will earn extra marks towards their monthly tests.*
Students:	*The students quieten down and start to write in their notebooks.*

(Seng: Visit 2. Language Lesson. Running Record #13)

(i) Monitoring students who are copying

One area in which all the beginning teachers were seen to have problems was in monitoring the students at work. During the first two rounds of classroom observations all the teachers spent much of the lesson walking around the room checking students, talking to them and encouraging them to copy from the board or from the text. However, by the third round of observations there was significantly less direct interaction between the teachers and the students. As the amount of work to get through increased and as more copying work was set, the teachers often resorted to calling out *"Are you all copying?"* and when the students chanted back, *"Yes"* the teachers left them alone. When teachers did not monitor, students simply copied without attempting to actually do the sums. Tiputai in particular, working with a large class in relatively difficult conditions, often seemed tired and during the last two visits, frequently sat at her desk while her students copied from the board. Both Seng, and Khamxing with the added responsibility of a second class later in the year, increasingly set copying tasks but often did not bother to walk around the room any more to check what was happening. Bounyang was the exception - to the end of the year he continued to check on his students and encouraged them as they worked. He maintained his enthusiasm throughout and gained satisfaction from their progress stating: *"I can see that some children can really read now"* (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 1).

(ii) Limitations of copying

The beginning teachers all viewed copying as an essential teaching strategy. As Khamxing explained: "*When I try something myself I am unsure if it is the right thing to do so that's why I think I make them copy – it's safer!"* (Khamxing: Visit 3. Interview 2). However, increasingly they expressed a desire to expand their teaching repertoire and organise other kinds of activities. Seng, for example, expressed her frustration with the limitations of

copying: "*I can't seem to solve the problem of how to teach them to read. I have made them copy out all the vowels but still they can't remember them"* (Seng: Visit 2. Interview 3).

By the end-of-year interviews each of the beginning teachers had requested support so that they could develop other ideas about how to teach. The problem was particularly pronounced in Language, because as the teachers explained, apart from a few activities[185] constantly repeated in the teachers' guide, there were no instructions about how to teach children who needed remedial assistance. Copying was taken up by default as a strategy that was not only considered "*efficient"* and "*safe"* but also one that was both familiar from their own school-days as well as one that they observed their colleagues using.

6.2.4 Calling students to the board

Calling small groups of one or two students out to the board to complete work was both a teaching and a classroom management strategy, and was frequently used by the beginning teachers, particularly in Mathematics and Language lessons. The strategy seemed to have three purposes – first, to help teachers manage the class; second, to encourage students to learn; and third, to assist teachers to monitor student progress.

Table 6.7: Number and percentage of observed core subject lessons in which beginning teachers called some or all of the class in small groups to work at the board

Teachers	Number of core subject lessons observed	Core subject lessons observed when some students called to the board in small groups in a lesson		Core subject lessons observed when all students called to the board in small groups in a lesson	
		Number of lessons	Percentage of lessons	Number of lessons	Percentage of lessons
Bounyang	36	21	58%	10	28%
Tiputai	28	8	29%	0	0%
Khamxing	33	8	24%	0	0%
Seng	34	19	56%	0	0%
Total	**131**	**60**	**46%**	**10**	**7%**

NOTE: 'small groups' defined as one, two or three students

As can be seen in Table 6.7, Bounyang and Seng relied on this strategy much more than the other two teachers. Khamxing who used the approach in the first semester, stopped when he was given responsibility for also teaching a Grade 4 class, as the approach was so time-

[185] Strategies for teaching Lao Language listed in the teachers' guides are reading in unison, reading individually, finding words that link, doing dictation, reciting poems and short texts, handwriting, telling stories from pictures, filling in cloze exercises, and writing sentences from new words.

consuming. And Tiputai used this strategy in only 8 out of 28 observed core subject lessons, because, as she explained, with such a large class it was difficult for her to have students at the board for any length of time and still retain control of the class. As Khamxing explains, the threat of being brought to the board was enough to motivate some of his students to complete their work:

> *When a student writes on the board, the other students can call out if there is something wrong, and if there is a problem then the teacher can also explain. Coming to the board puts pressure on the student. Because they know others are watching them, it makes them self-conscious and the student at the board thinks 'I have to try, I have to do it right!'*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 3. Interview 2)

While a student was at the board the teacher usually watched the attempts to do the exercise, whether a calculation or some words to write or a text to read, and as necessary, helped the student to do the task. Bounyang, in particular, used time at the board as a chance for one-on-one teaching aimed at helping the student to learn and gain confidence. All teachers maintained that bringing students to the board was the only way they could really assess what an individual could do. They argued that when students were sitting at their desks they could easily copy from each other, and homework was often completed by siblings.

(i) <u>Selecting students to come to the board</u>

When coming to the board was used to explain a concept, the teacher had to decide who to call out. Initially the beginning teachers spoke of asking 'stronger' students to come to the board. However, after a couple of months Seng and Khamxing both reported being advised by their principal that the DEB had issued an edict that teachers were to involve 'weaker' students in all such activities. The two teachers agreed that after this they included the 'weaker' students but they also admitted that in reality it was easier to choose the 'stronger students'. Khamxing explained his position:

> *I don't just want the best students to come to the board to read but I think that if they come first that will help the weaker students as they can listen and see them pointing to the words. Then after they hear the passage read a few times they might be more confident to try themselves.*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 2. Interview 2)

(ii) Managing the class while students are at the board

Being called to the board was also used for controlling students who were misbehaving or not concentrating. Once out the front the individual student would receive either praise and perhaps additional marks if correct, or criticism and 'shaming' if wrong. In Seng's and Khamxing's classes, the 'weaker' students, fearing such treatment, never volunteered to answer questions but remained silent rather than risk public humiliation. Both Khamxing and Seng often called disruptive students to the board as a disciplinary measure. During the first few months, Khamxing in particular, was observed reprimanding students at the board who took too long to answer questions: "*You can't stand there forever wasting my time and that of the rest of the class. You have to listen to me. It shouldn't be too hard for you! When I am explaining, listen next time!"* (Khamxing: Visit 2. Maths Lesson. Running Record #19).

This practice of making the class listen and wait for those at the board was commonly used in reading lessons. During these lessons individuals, or groups of two or three students, would come to the board to read parts of the text while the rest of the class sat at their desks. During such lessons the students who were waiting for those at the board rarely appeared to be listening. Seng, Tiputai and Khamxing were all observed using this kind of lesson but it was Bounyang, with his Grade 1 class who used the approach most often.

> *Bounyang called for students to come, one-by-one, to the board, to read out the sentence: "The buffalo is in the field". The rest of the class was told to watch the board. After a few students had been out the front to read, the other students were restless, so Bounyang called the class to attention and told them to put their hands on their heads. When he was satisfied they were quiet and looking at the board he instructed the next student to come out the front. This pattern continued on and on as one child after another traipsed out to read the sentence while the rest of the class murmured and chatted in the background until Bounyang pulled them up again. Meanwhile the policeman's son and his two friends were at the back of the room trying to catch a mouse. The reading of the one sentence by each of the 55 students at school that day took just on an hour.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 1. Running Record. Lao Language #12)

In the first half of the year, Bounyang frequently used this strategy. As recorded in Table 6.7 above, of the 36 core subject lessons which Bounyang was observed teaching, 58% of them involved calling several students to the board, while 28% of these lessons involved all of the students coming one-by-one to the board to complete a task such as reading a sentence or writing a word. During these lengthy sessions Bounyang always offered his students encouragement and was never seen to reprimand those who were shy.

When asked why he favoured 'coming-to-the-board' as a teaching strategy, he recalled his own *"painful experiences"* as a child of being embarrassed and shy in front of the class. His rationale for bringing students when they were only in Grade 1 to the board was so that they would not grow up shy, as he had, but would develop the confidence to speak up in front of others.

(iii) Limitations of bringing students to the board

Asking students to come and stand at the front of the room was a common strategy. The teachers saw the strategy being used in other classrooms and recalled having to come to the board during their own school days. The sight of one or two students at the board while the rest of the class sat and watched was a common image of 'classroom life'. Having a couple of students working at the board while still maintaining control of the rest of the class and having them engaged in something profitable required skills in classroom management. However, none of the beginning teachers managed this successfully and instead students frequently waited while learning time was wasted. Even though the teachers admitted at interview that when they used this teaching method the majority of their students were just waiting, they were unable to suggest alternative strategies for engaging those who were sitting at their desks.

6.2.5 Summary

This section of the chapter has provided an overview of the ways the beginning teachers commonly delivered their lessons. A focus on teacher explanation persisted throughout, although as the year progressed and less time was put into lesson preparation, explanations were mostly impromptu and delivered less often with teaching aids. With respect to questioning, there was a gradual relaxation of following the textbook examples as the four teachers started to respond to the needs of their students. However, the kinds of questions used still focused on retrieving information rather than on asking students for ideas or opinions. Overall, lessons were dominated by copying from the board or the textbook and by the end of the year this practice had increased in importance as teachers raced to complete the textbooks.

The message in the Grade 3 Moral Education textbook tells students what is expected of them: "*A hardworking student comes to school everyday; copies the lesson down; answers the teacher's questions; reads the textbook; and helps to clean the classroom"* (Grade 3 Moral Education Textbook: Unit No 8). As described in this section, the beginning teachers assisted students to accomplish these tasks but when they did so their questions were limited and

copying consumed much of the lesson. However, in between these traditional practices, the four teachers did attempt to implement the learner-centred methods which they had been exposed to during their pre-service course. Their attempts to use learner-centred methods, and to deliver more engaging lessons, are the focus of the next section.

6.3 Attempts to Implement Learner-Centred Methods

This section examines the ways the four beginning teachers attempted to use learner-centred methods in their classrooms.[186] As discussed in Chapter 4, the beginning teachers were exposed to such strategies during their pre-service course[187] where they were taught that learner-centred methods: (i) use activities in lessons; (ii) use group work; (iii) use teaching aids and concrete materials; (iv) use skilful questioning; and, (v) link the textbook to the student's real life. This section draws on lesson observations to identify the practices which were attempted by the beginning teachers and also examines the interviews to understand the difficulties and constraints which they experienced as they tried to adopt these methods.

6.3.1 The use of activities in lessons

As noted in Chapter 4, the beginning teachers reported that when they were students at the TTC they rarely had the opportunity to observe lessons that incorporated activities. However, after graduation, and now responsible for teaching a class, they discovered that delivering lessons which incorporated activities that they had had little experience of themselves,[188] or which they had previously only heard or read about but never seen, required both imagination and determination.

Here 'activities' refer to any teaching strategy used to promote learning apart from following the textbook lesson, reading the textbook, copying the textbook, answering textbook questions, or doing calculations from the textbook. Activities can be undertaken with either the whole class or with groups; however, the focus here is on the use of activities with the whole class. Their use in group work is discussed in Section 6.3.2.

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186 Learner-centred methods are integral to the MoE's *National Charter of Teacher Competencies* (MoE, 2007a). The list of required competencies for a teacher include: *#16. "Supporting learning through group work"; #22. "Employing modern teaching methodologies"; #23. "Matching teaching to the real life situation of the students"; and, #24. "Selecting appropriate teaching materials"*.

187 Since the educational reform process commenced in the late 1990s, most Lao teacher education curriculum documents refer to the importance of teachers incorporating 'learner-centred methods' into their teaching. For example, *11+1 Primary Teaching Method* textbook (MoE, 1996).

188 The four beginning teachers reported that during their course they were involved in group discussions as well as "brainstorming" topics with their lecturers – both typical group work activities.

(i) Types of activities

Whole-class activities were sometimes recommended in the teachers' guides; however, they were of a routine nature and most suggestions drew on the same small set of tasks.[189] While the beginning teachers, at least initially, attempted to follow the recommendations in the teachers' guides, they were rarely seen to use any 'original' whole-class activities of their own.

Table 6.8: Type and number of times 'original' whole-class activities were observed being used within 155 lessons by the beginning teachers

'Original' activities incorporated into lessons	Subject in which activity used	Number of times activities were observed being used				
		Bounyang	Tiputai	Khamxing	Seng	**Total**
Brainstorm	Lao Language	1				**1**
Quiz	Mathematics			1		**1**
Brainstorm and concept map	World Around Us		2			**2**
Classification game	World Around Us		1			**1**
Role play	World Around Us		1		1	**2**
Making puppets, paper folding	Handicrafts	1	1		1	**3**
Total	All Subjects	**2**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**10**

NOTE: A whole-class activity is defined as 'original' when it is not suggested in the relevant teachers' guide

Table 6.8 records the very small number of times in the course of observing 155 lessons when the beginning teachers used 'original' whole-class activities i.e. ones that did not originate from the relevant teachers' guide. Out of 54 Language lessons and 58 Mathematics lessons that were observed, on only two occasions was the beginning teacher seen to use an 'original' whole class activity, one in each subject area.

(ii) Incorporating activities - the difficulties

Of the ten lessons observed in which 'original' whole class activities were used by the beginning teachers, five instances were recorded in the first round of visits, five in the second round, and none during the rest of the year. From interviews with the four teachers there appear to be three reasons why they stopped trying to incorporate 'original' activities into lessons. First, that they were not only unsure about how to implement activities but even when they did they felt under pressure to get through the tasks set in the textbook. The following statements are typical: *"I am not so sure how to put activities into the lesson which are not in the textbook and so I find myself not trying in case I am not doing it correctly"* (Bounyang: Visit 2. Interview 2). *"The College lecturers should have taught us how to use activities with the textbook lessons because I am not sure how to do this by myself"* (Khamxing:

[189] See Chapter 6, Footnote 185.

Visit 3. Interview 2). *"If I often use activities I think about how long its taking and worry that I won't have enough time to follow the textbook"* (Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 2).

The second reason given for not using 'original' activities was a lack of knowledge and confidence about how to manage student behaviour while running an activity. As Tiputai explained: *"Once they have something to do where they have to talk to each other it's much harder to control them"* (Tiputai: Visit 2. Interview 2). The four teachers found they had to specifically train students how to behave when they introduced them to new activities. If students were to be allowed to participate in a role-play or a group discussion then the teachers had to decide on the rules for the activity and the behaviour that they would accept, something they reported not having covered in their pre-service course. Seng spoke of her frustration at not knowing how to manage her students:

> *I would like to have learnt how to get students involved when I teach. But in the teachers' college they taught us as adults and we just listened, but I have to teach children and they are much harder to control.*
>
> (Seng: Visit 1. Interview 2)

The third reason given for not using 'original' activities was that they saw few examples of learner-centred strategies being used in the schools. While all four teachers interviewed had been told by their principal to use "*learner-centred methods*"[190] very few of their colleagues actually did so. It appeared that a lack of knowledge about how to implement learner-centred methods was not just a problem for beginning teachers. At the end of the year the beginning teachers were asked why they did not use more activities in their lessons. Khamxing summed up his bewilderment with the comment: *"The other teachers at my school are the same as me. They do what I do and to be honest I don't know what else I could do*" (Khamxing: Visit 4. Interview 4). Tiputai explained that she had asked the other staff about how to put activities into the lessons but unlike her questions about administrative matters, these queries remained unanswered:

> *At first I asked for suggestions from the other staff, but they didn't seem to be interested in my questions and so I stopped. It took me a while to realise, but after a few months I got the feeling that they didn't have any suggestions. From what I could see their classrooms were the same as mine. The other teachers say 'you should use learner-centred methods' but they don't implement this in their own teaching.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 3)

[190] Seng's principal reported that the DEB had instructed her to see that her teachers used learner-centred methods. (Salai Village Principal: Visit 3. Journal Notes).

6.3.2 Group work

All the beginning teachers recalled *"group work"* being discussed in their pre-service course. Its main purpose was: *"to allow stronger students to help weaker students"*. However, the group work tasks which the teachers observed on practicum were restricted, being limited to choral reading, completing maths problems and having group discussions.[191] None of the beginning teachers recalled being given advice in their course about ways to organise groups, about what constituted an 'authentic' group work task, or how to manage the stages of group work.[192]

Once out teaching, both Seng and Khamxing reported that they were instructed by the principal that they were to use group work so that, echoing the advice from the TTC: "*strong students can help weaker students*". These instructions, they were told, had come from the DEB - group work was to be incorporated into the teaching practices of all teachers. Tiputai, who rarely used group work, recorded in her journal that: *"I was told by a colleague to include a group discussion in my Language lesson plans to send to the DEB"* (Tiputai: Week 31. Journal). Although she admitted that she did not actually use the technique, she nonetheless felt: *"It is a method which is part of the new way of teaching and something which I know I should be using"* (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 1). However, given the limited exposure to group work which the beginning teachers experienced in their pre-service course, it was not surprising to find that as teachers they were limited in both the range of group activities they used, as well as in how they organised the groups.

(i) <u>Group activities</u>

During the first visits it was apparent that when teachers reported that they had the children working in groups this usually meant that students were organised to sit in groups and read together, complete sums together or to discuss something together – the same three tasks that had been observed on practicum. In practice, during many of the observed lessons, *"group work"* simply meant that the students sat in groups.

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191 Tiputai reported "*being able to observe for two days on practicum before having to teach full time"* (Tiputai: Visit 2. Journal Notes). The three other beginning teachers also had relatively short periods for observation before they were given charge of a class.

192 For the purpose of this discussion group work is defined as "authentic" when the task set requires the participation of each group member if it is to be completed fully. See Reid (2002) for an excellent discussion of small group learning.

Table 6.9: Number and percentage of 155 observed lessons in which games and activities were used in groups

Types of games and activities used in groups	Number of lessons in which games or activities were observed being used in groups				
	Bounyang	Tiputai	Khamxing	Seng	Total
Completing a maths worksheet	4		1		5
Discussion to describe a picture	1				1
Discussion about a question set by the teacher	1				1
Guessing game				1	1
Writing game				1	1
Classification game				3	3
Calculating answers to sums written on the board	1*	1	1*	1	4
Reading in unison		1	2	1	4
Making a sculpture from clay			1*		1
Making a cube from paper				1*	1
Playing team sports		1			1
Total number of lessons in which games and activities were observed being used in groups	**7**	**3**	**5**	**8**	**23**
Total number of lessons observed	40	36	37	42	155
Percentage of lessons in which games and activities were observed being used in groups	**18%**	**8%**	**14%**	**19%**	**15%**

NOTE: * Students also handled concrete materials

As Table 6.9 records, 23 of the 155 lessons observed, or 15%, involved group work in which games and activities were used. However, most of the tasks that were set as group work could be completed by one or two students without any input from the rest of the group. In all cases the underlying assumption appeared to be that simply by telling students to work together, that this would automatically happen, irrespective of the task that they had been set.

(ii) Group membership

In the schools it was common practice to organise student work-rosters by dividing each class into five equal-sized groups and assigning each group one day a week when it was their responsibility for undertaking tasks such as cleaning the classroom and bringing water to school. Initially, all the beginning teachers also used these work-roster groups as their class work groups – an approach that had been recommended by a particular lecturer at the TTC.[193]

[193] However, none of the teachers recalled being given any advice about the membership of each group and the suitability of forming 'random' groups, nor any discussion about the practicalities of dividing large classes into five groups.

By the second round of observational visits the teachers had started to change the way they formed class groups. Tiputai, Seng and Khamxing no longer used the work-roster and now simply told students to turn their benches to face each other. Then, in the first weeks of the second semester Khamxing reported that he had *"sorted out"* the groups in his class so that even though students still 'turned around' he had organised the seating so that each group had a mix of weak and strong students. He also reported allocating marks to students to encourage them to work in groups. Students, he said, were motivated by this approach. However, a few more weeks into the second semester, and with the added responsibility of another class, Khamxing stopped group work altogether because it was: *"too difficult to juggle teaching two classes and to do group work at the same time"* (Khamxing: Visit 4. Interview 1).

Throughout the first semester Seng made genuine efforts to use group work, but for her the problem was trying to manage the behaviour of a few unruly boys, and this, she found, was more difficult when the class was in groups. By the second semester, she, too, had stopped using groups although encouraged by the new principal to try again.

Bounyang was the exception. Even with 60 students he continued to use groups and did so in an increasingly systematic way. By Semester 2 he had organised his class into nine small permanent groups each with their own "*leader*". He explained that from his own observations he had realised that groups: *"needed to be the same each time for students to learn to work together"* (Bounyang: Visit 3. Interview 2).

(iii) *Implementing group work - the difficulties*

From the start of the year each of the teachers reported in their journals that group work was *"difficult"*. Tiputai, Seng and Khamxing had started out using group work, but their attempts gradually degenerated into simply letting students sit with friends to help each other complete individual tasks. The two reasons given why they were reluctant to persevere with formal group work were first, a lack of knowledge of activities that constituted authentic group tasks; and second, a lack of the skills necessary to get children to work collaboratively together.

Seng, unsure of group activities, decided to use her teaching time to *"get through"* the textbook. Like Khamxing, she maintained that using group work lengthened the teaching time for each lesson and therefore lessened her chances of completing the textbooks: *"I didn't really know how to make the students like working in groups and I don't see any real advantage in it"* (Seng: Visit 2. Interview 1). Although the new principal encouraged her to

use group work to help weaker students, and from interviews she appeared to understand how to organise group membership, she rarely had the students working in groups.

Tiputai, with her large class, reported how the teacher who shared the class-space with her had told her early in the year "*not to bother with groups as it is too hard"* (Tiputai: Visit 1. Interview 2). She also reported that group work was uncommon at her school and she had not seen any other teachers using this approach. By the end of the year she admitted that she had given up using groups.

When asked to think back to their own school days, none of the beginning teachers could recall working in groups except for some choral reading activities. Their first real experience of the approach came when they were at the TTC when they were split up into groups for the purpose of having a discussion. They also remembered 'group work' as a topic in the pre-service course but one that was never demonstrated. On arrival in their schools they were generally exhorted by the principal to undertake group work as one of the planks of modern teaching, but given no practical help as to how to actually implement this. Nor were the other teachers much help. The beginning teachers reported that except for some 'reading in groups' and some 'sports activities', no other group work was used in neighbouring classes. By the end of the year, three of the beginning teachers had given up. Only Bounyang had developed a method for managing groups, although he also said it was difficult to design appropriate activities.

6.3.3 Using teaching aids and concrete materials

The beginning teachers all stated that using teaching aids and concrete materials helped children learn. They had talked about this topic in their pre-service course and mentioned it frequently during our discussions and in the interviews. Teaching aids were taken to be any material beyond the textbook or the blackboard which the teacher could use for instructional purposes, including concrete materials which the students could examine and use. Very occasionally commercially produced posters and charts were available but usually teaching aids had to be made by the teacher.[194] They were used: to explain something, to illustrate a point, to demonstrate an effect, and sometimes given to students to handle and manipulate.

[194] Most of the schools had a map of Laos and an alphabet poster, and all had pictures of Marx, Lenin and various Lao political leaders. Health charts were included in the UNICEF 'Blue Box'.

Table 6.10: Number of the 155 observed lessons in which teaching aids or concrete materials were used by the beginning teachers and/or by the students

Subject	Type of teaching aid / concrete material	Number of lessons in which teaching aids or concrete materials were used:	
		by teachers	by students
Lao Language	Word holder	1	1
	Word cards	2	1
	Map	1	
Maths	Counting materials (stones, sticks, beans)	8	2
	3-D shapes (a ball, a matchbox, a tin)	3	1
	Paper shapes/diagrams	3	
World Around Us	Word cards	2	2
	Magnets (from a wrecked motorbike)	1	
	Ice (from the local shop)	1	
	Plants	1	1
	Hand drawn pictures	3	
Handicrafts	Paper, card, egg shells, clay	4	4
Gardening	Seeds	1	1
Total number of times teaching aids were observed being used		**31**	**13**

Table 6.10 provides an overview of the teaching aids and concrete materials which were observed in use. Teaching aids were used by teachers in 31 of 155 lessons, or 20% of the lessons; and students got to handle concrete materials, such as stones for counting, in only 13 of 155 lessons, or 8% of the lessons. This low rate of usage belies the frequent claims by the beginning teachers of the merits of using teaching aids and concrete materials.

(i) Teaching aids in practice

The beginning teachers claimed that by using teaching aids they could motivate children to listen, particularly during lengthy explanations, as described earlier in Section 6.2. However, except for a word holder made out of recycled cardboard and some word cards, hand drawn pictures and maths diagrams, no other examples of posters or charts or objects which teachers had made were seen in use. Most teaching aids were objects brought to school by the teachers, such as magnets, and were used for teacher-only demonstrations. Table 6.11 shows the number and percentage of the 131 observed core subject lessons in which the beginning teachers used teaching aids. For Bounyang, Khamxing and Seng their average use of teaching aids during Visits 3 and 4 was roughly half of that seen earlier during Visits 1 and 2.

They also confirmed during the final interviews that the pattern seen in the observed lessons mirrored their decreasing use of teaching aids when I was not present. And although Tiputai doubled her use of teaching aids in the second half of the year, she admitted that she generally used teaching aids only when I was at her school (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 3). Similarly Khamxing explained that he mainly used teaching aids when I was visiting, and particularly in any lesson that was videoed (Khamxing: Visit 3. Interview 2).

Table 6.11: Number and percentage of the 131 observed core subject lessons in which the beginning teachers used teaching aids

Beginning Teacher	Number of lessons observed	Number and percentage of 131 observed core subject lessons in which teacher used teaching aids		
		Number of lessons in visits 1 and 2	Number of lessons in visits 3 and 4	Number (%) of lessons in visits 1, 2, 3 and 4
Bounyang	36	3	2	5 (14%)
Tiputai	28	2	4	6 (21%)
Khamxing	33	5	3	8 (24%)
Seng	34	5	2	7 (21%)
Total	**131**	**15**	**11**	**26 (20%)**

(ii) Making teaching aids and utilising concrete materials - the difficulties

Given the emphasis placed in the pre-service course on using teaching aids to assist student learning, it was surprising how quickly the beginning teachers fell away from this practice. Towards the end of the year they explained why this happened: first, they lacked time; second, they had difficulty managing student behaviour; and third, they had few ideas about how to make teaching aids from local materials. These reasons are better understood by considering teaching aids and concrete materials separately.

All of the beginning teachers said that they *"lacked time"* and this was confirmed when I lived with families in the villages. Once teachers returned home from school their time was taken up with household chores or with tasks related to their family's crops. After this 'family work' was done there was little time left for thinking about school. Early in the year Tiputai explained that although she knew it was best if she used teaching aids, and she had made some word cards, but: *"everything takes time which I don't have"* (Tiputai: Visit 1. Interview 1). On a couple of occasions Khamxing went to great trouble to produce replicas of textbook

drawings to hold up in front of the class for lessons which were to be videoed. However, Khamxing, trying to justify why he rarely used teaching aids, explained:

> *Towards the end of December, after harvesting was over, I had more time at night so I was able to look at the textbook and to prepare some teaching aids. I don't do this when harvesting is on because I am too tired.*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 3. Interview 1)

As the schools had few commercially produced teaching aids, most of those used in the classroom were made by the teacher. The beginning teachers all raised the issue that more than anything else, what they needed was paper and marker pens so that they could make word cards and posters for Lao Language lessons.[195] While there was no denying that card and paper in these villages was in short supply,[196] and therefore making teaching aids such as posters and word cards was difficult, the teachers did not exploit the potential of other materials which existed around the community. However, from discussions, it became apparent that the teachers had never seen how local materials could be used to make teaching aids. Instead they remained focused on making word cards and posters using paper and felt tipped pens like the ones they had seen on practicum in the urban schools. What appeared to be lacking was exposure to how local materials could be used creatively to contribute to learning.

As Table 6.10 shows, the students rarely got to handle concrete materials. With the exception of Bounyang, what was important to the beginning teachers, was that they used the materials as teaching aids to demonstrate a point. This, they said, was sufficient to assist student learning. None of the beginning teachers could recall being told in their pre-service course that it was important for conceptual development that students actually handled and manipulated concrete materials – pouring water, making bundles of ten using sticks, shaping some clay into a cube, making a model village out of twigs and leaves and coconut fibre. Nor did they report seeing students in the neighbouring classes being given concrete materials to manipulate. Out of a total of 58 mathematics lessons that were observed, only two involved the students handling concrete materials at their desks. Both of these were lessons run by Bounyang (see Appendix 1).

It was Seng, in particular, who said she found it difficult to control her students' behaviour when concrete materials were involved in the lesson. She also expressed her concern that getting the students to use concrete materials unnecessarily stretched out the

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[195] Trainees were encouraged by lecturers to make and use teaching aids such as word cards and posters while on practicum.

[196] None of the four schools appeared to receive operational funds for maintenance or for resources.

lesson time. At the end of the year she gave a lesson to teach about magnetism and had gone to some trouble to borrow two magnets salvaged from a wrecked motorbike. However, rather than passing the magnets around the room and letting the students feel the push and pull of magnetic forces themselves, she simply held up the magnets and talked about what she was feeling. When the structure of this lesson was raised with her she explained:

> *At the TTC they didn't give us many examples of how to organise activities or use materials in the lessons, and at the same time keep control of the class. I find that whenever I let my class become involved in an activity they will become disruptive, especially if they use concrete materials. That's why this morning I did not want them to touch the magnets or other materials - I thought it would be better if they just watched.*
>
> (Seng: Visit 4. Interview 4)

6.3.4 Questioning

The issue of teacher talk and questioning was addressed in Section 6.2.2. There it was shown that the majority of questions asked by beginning teachers required the students simply to recall information available in the textbook. The teachers used open questions that required the students to think about their own situations far less frequently. Questions that required the students to make evaluative statements or to give an opinion were even less common.

While there was no rule that told the beginning teachers that they could not design their own questions, there was an initial reluctance on their part to do so. The analysis given in Table 6.4 of the types of questions posed in the Grade 3 Language and World Around Us textbooks, showed that there were few textbook questions requiring students to give evaluative comments, and in the classroom students' opinions were rarely sought or heard. When the teachers did take time to listen to students voicing their opinions, they sometimes expressed surprise at the responses. Khamxing, for example, spoke about his reaction when his students gave him their opinions about issues raised in the Grade 3 Language Lesson #18:

> *I was surprised when I asked the class if they agreed with the story. I asked if they agreed with the brother who stole his family's inheritance. One student said he wouldn't steal because he was afraid of ghosts. Then some other students said that they were also afraid of ghosts and that's why you needed to look after your dead relatives. I was surprised at how they had their own opinion about the issue even though they were only in Grade 3.*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 2. Interview 2)

Although the textbook dominated the teaching practices of the beginning teachers, over the year, as they gained confidence, they were all observed veering away from asking just textbook questions. As Bounyang explained:

> *After awhile I started to modify the questions in the textbooks. At first I thought I just had to teach the textbook but when I taught in the classroom I realised I had to make my work relate to their lives so that they could understand what the textbook lesson was about.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit. 4. Interview 1)

The next section examines the last of the five learner-centred methods that the beginning teachers where encouraged to use - linking the textbook lessons to the students' lives, and this was done mostly through the use of questions.

6.3.5 Linking teaching to the real lives of the students

In discussions held at the Pakse TTC in 2009, several lecturers reported that the topic of "*linking teaching to the students' lives*" was covered in the pre-service course[197] but that even though this strategy was MoE policy, there were few guidelines available about how it might be implemented.[198] The allocation in the timetable of 140 minutes per week for *"school activities"* was seen by one lecturer as an attempt *"to get schools to develop local curricula and so link the school to the students' real lives".*[199] In practice, however, local *curricula* were usually only developed when schools received external support from an NGO.[200] Of the four schools in this study none had developed local *curricula* and the time allocation of 140 minutes per week was typically used for gardening, repairs to school property, and cleaning classrooms. The implementation of the strategy was left to individual teachers and to their interpretation of what it meant within their own classes.[201] Attempts by the beginning teachers to implement this policy were of three kinds: (i) lessons which drew on local interests and events; (ii) lessons which involved modification of textbook tasks; and, (iii) lessons which

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197 During interviews at the Pakse Teacher Training College in May 2009, lecturers reported that the topic of "*linking teaching to the students' lives*" was brought to trainees attention in the Teaching Methodology subject. They also reported that "*adapting the textbook to the students' environment*" was mentioned in the course but that no practical exercises were set for students on this topic.

198 Support for the adoption of local curricula is found in the 2007 *National Charter of Teacher Competencies* (MoE, 2007a). Competency #21 reads "*implement the National Curriculum and know how to design local curricula and relevant activities*".

199 Personal communication, May 2009, Senior Lecturer, Pakse Teacher Training College.

200 In 2008 a review conducted by UNICEF identified four NGOs funding local curriculum projects. (Willsher, 2008, p. 15).

201 In 2009, I facilitated a workshop in Vientiane funded by UNICEF when 25 teachers discussed the topic of "*developing local curricula*". While some maintained this just required substituting the local equivalents of such things as the festivals and foods mentioned in the textbooks, others argued that it required using 20% of the curriculum time to teach about things which happened locally. The workshop ended after five days without resolution, consensus or the formulation of an agreed position.

involved asking questions about the individual or collective circumstances of students. These three types are now discussed.

(i) Lessons drawing on local events and interests

Although there was much activity in the villages, including religious festivals, the cycle of agricultural activities, and not infrequently, government interventions,[202] teachers rarely drew on these events to link the classroom with the students' lives. Out of the 155 observed lessons only two incorporated attempts by the teacher, to link the students' lives to learning at school. The first was Seng's attempt to create a class vegetable garden. She reported that she had been encouraged in this by the Grade 5 teacher who said it might improve her relationships with her *"difficult students"*. The students brought seeds and organic fertiliser from home and for several weeks the class worked enthusiastically to establish their garden. The second example came after the visit of a puppet troupe to the village. At the students' request Seng let some children make their own puppets as a handicraft lesson and later let three boys and three girls perform for the class. Seng explained: *"it was not something I planned but I am happy to see the students enjoying themselves"* (Seng: Visit 2. Interview 2). Another example of linking school and real life was reported by Bounyang:

> *In the World Around Us there is a topic about keeping healthy so I told the students to bring a toothbrush to school. Some told me that they never brushed their teeth so I told them to ask their parents to buy them a brush. Then I taught them how to clean their teeth.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 2. Interview 1)

Three of the beginning teachers reported receiving no encouragement from other staff about the need to link outside activities or events and lessons while the fourth teacher, Tiputai, was actively discouraged from making any such linkage. As she recorded in her journal:

> *I asked for suggestions for the handicraft lesson about teaching agriculture, but the teacher I talked to said that it's related to the students' real lives and they already do this so you don't have to teach them about it.*
>
> (Tiputai: Journal. Week 16)

When asked during an interview about the outcome, Tiputai explained: "*I followed her advice. I couldn't be seen to do things differently"* (Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 1).

[202] See Chapter 5 and Appendix 1 case records for details of village life.

(ii) Lessons which involved modification of textbook tasks

Apart from the occasions when teachers made mathematical questions easier, few examples were seen of the teachers modifying the tasks set in the textbooks. However, in a lesson on estimating distances, Khamxing decided to get the students to draw their own original maps instead of getting them to copy the map in the textbook:

> *Instead of telling the students to turn to the textbook page as usual, Khamxing explained that he wanted them to draw a map of the local area, putting in the roads to the neighbouring hamlets and writing in the approximate distances. As they drew their maps in their notebooks Khamxing moved around the classroom not just to keep students quiet, but looking over their shoulders to see what they were drawing. He stopped in front of several students asking them to explain their maps. He seemed interested in their responses and later came to the back of the room to tell me: 'I didn't know they could draw so well - even the quiet kids who don't usually do much are getting involved.'*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 3. Journal Notes)

This lesson provided an opportunity to gauge the teacher's reaction when the outcome of the lesson was not exactly as predicted in the textbook. Although Khamxing was pleased with the students' work and the maps that had been produced, after class he was reluctant to count the work as *"equivalent to the textbook lesson"* as the maps they had used were not the same as the one in the textbook. However, after some discussion, he agreed that the modified lesson taught the same skills as the textbook lesson and accepted that the lesson objective, which had been met, was the same in both cases.

(iii) Lessons which involved questions about the students' circumstances

The most common way in which the teachers linked their teaching to the lives of their students, was through questioning. This was usually done in the introductory part of a lesson and typically involved the teacher asking the students about some aspect of their daily life such as: "How do you feed a buffalo?", "Where do you find firewood?", "What games do you play?", "Do you like the rocket festival?" and then relating their answers to the lesson.[203] Bounyang, with his young Grade 1 students, many of whom came from homes where Lao was not spoken, talked about how he had learnt to consider the students' lives:

> *At first I thought I just taught the textbook, but later on I realised I had to relate it to their real life so they could understand what the textbook lesson was about.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 1)

[203] As described in Section 6.2.2, in only 26 out of 155 lessons (17%) were teachers observed asking students questions about their own lives and environments.

Although Bounyang's comments suggest a realisation that textbook tasks could be modified, it was mostly through questioning that he managed to link textbook topics to the children's experiences. He also reported that in order to get the children to think about the topic before looking for clues in the textbook, he had stopped handing out textbooks at the start of every lesson. As the beginning teachers became more confident in their teaching they questioned the children more about their lives but in the end they usually returned to the safety of the textbook to continue the lesson.

(iv) Linking teaching to the students' real lives - the difficulties

The beginning teacher's main concern with linking teaching to the students' lives was the same with respect to all of the learner-centred strategies - it took time away from the textbook lessons. Even when students were interested in topics outside of the immediate lesson, the teachers never spent more than a short time on them before the textbook was back on the table. None of the teachers reported being aware about the use of 'local curricula' and none of them reported having learnt in their pre-service course how to modify the textbook in order to draw on local events.[204] Apart from Seng, none of the beginning teachers were encouraged by other staff members to look for topics or events which interested the students. And even Seng, with her vegetable garden, and her puppets which served to improve relationships with her students, when questioned about whether she could use such lessons to teach literacy or numeracy replied: *"I have never thought of doing this"* (Seng: Visit 3. Interview 2).

6.3.6 Summary

Each of the beginning teachers reported that the instructions they had been given in their pre-service course to use learner-centred methods, were repeated by the principal. However, they quickly realised that, for the reasons summarised in Table 6.12 below, in practice such methods were not so easy to use. As Tiputai explained, the overarching reason for the difficulties they experienced was that they had had limited exposure themselves to such methods:

> *I now realise that one of the main problems is that I never actually saw the methods they talked about in the College being put into practice, neither during the course, nor after I started work.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 1)

[204] See Chapter 6, Footnote 198.

Table 6.12: Reasons given by the four beginning teachers as to why learner-centred methods were difficult to implement

Reasons for Not Implementing Learner-Centred Methods	Learner-Centred Methods				
	Use of Activities	Group Work	Teaching Aids	Use Questions	Link to Real Life
Limited advice in pre-service course work	✓	✓			✓
Limited opportunity to observe on practicum	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lack of general ideas about how to implement	✓		✓	✓	
Difficult to manage students' behaviour	✓	✓	✓		
Inadequate time to complete textbook lesson	✓	✓	✓		✓
Unsure of how to modify the textbook	✓	✓		✓	✓
Limited exposure to role models	✓	✓		✓	✓
Colleagues advised insufficient time to use	✓	✓			
No advice or encouragement by colleagues	✓	✓	✓		✓
Class too large		✓			
Lack of resources (pens, paper etc)			✓		

NOTE: ✓ = reason was given as to why a particular learner-centred method was not implemented

With textbooks always in the foreground of their teaching, each of the beginning teachers expressed their uncertainty about the extent to which they dared modify the lessons. Furthermore they believed that the incorporation of learner-centred methods lengthened the lesson and valuable time was lost. As the year progressed the need *"to get through the textbook"* became an increasingly reported concern, and anything that detracted from that goal was generally resisted. Out of the four schools, only one had a resource book which teachers could refer to for ideas on how to implement a learner-centred approach.[205] Besides Tiputai with her one book, the other beginning teachers had only their memories of what they had read in books at College to draw on for information and inspiration.

The main difficulties which the beginning teachers encountered in implementing learner-centred methods were organising activities and small group work, and for this they needed help. However, they saw their colleagues, including senior staff, teaching in traditional ways and rarely, if ever, using 'modern' teaching methods. The beginning teachers

[205] Tiputai found the resource book in the staffroom which one of the other teachers had been given the previous year while attending an EQIP II in-service program.

reported that they asked fewer questions now that they were out teaching than they had anticipated they would while they were still in training. These difficulties dampened their initial enthusiasm for using progressive teaching methods. As the year progressed they reported using such methods less frequently, and this was confirmed through the observations.

In general only a few of the attempts to use learner-centred methods could be regarded as successful; however, there were differences between the four teachers in the degree to which they were successful. Bounyang, although with 60 students and no one to talk to, worked out how to use group work through his own observations and reflections and also began to see the value of using concrete materials. Tiputai's initial enthusiasm for using learner-centred methods was tempered by its large size of 70 students, and with no positive models to guide her, succumbed to the traditional teaching patterns around her. Khamxing was more than able to create teaching aids when videoed, but in general he considered it too time consuming. He taught alongside other young teachers and modelled his behaviour according to their standards. Some positive attempts at group work and making lessons relevant were seen during the third observational visit, but then the responsibility of having to teach an additional class took away any time for thinking about innovative teaching strategies. And Seng, although encouraged in the middle of the year by the new principal to try group work to help the weaker students in her class, remained focused on classroom management and on completing the textbook and restricted her use of concrete materials and learning activities.

Working within an environment where the pressure to 'teach the textbook' was very high, and with limited practical knowledge about how to implement learner-centred methods, it is understandable that the beginning teachers gradually stopped trying to incorporate these approaches into their teaching. Although the majority of their teaching strategies were conservative and traditional, the beginning teachers all wanted their students to learn. Throughout the year they were each seen taking steps towards developing their own repertoire of strategies and it is the attempts they took to improve their teaching practice which are examined in the next section of this chapter.

6.4 Devising Strategies to Help Students Learn

At the beginning of the year, before they had met their class, the new teachers had assumed that the academic abilities of their students would be fairly similar and that they would all have passed the previous grade level. They also understood that their main teaching responsibility would be to transfer the content of the appropriate textbooks to the students. It therefore came as something of a shock to Tiputai, Khamxing and Seng, all teachers of Grade 3 classes, to discover that a substantial number of their students were not at their purported grade level and that some could not even read. During the first interviews Tiputai reported that more than half of her 70 students could not read; Khamxing, that around a third could not read; and Seng, that at least a quarter of her students could not read. Bounyang also spoke of his surprise when he discovered he would be teaching Grade 1, something he felt ill-prepared to do, that he had 60 students in his class, that half the class was repeating, and that none of his students could read or write. For some of his students it was the first time that they had held a pencil. After a few weeks in the classroom, each of the teachers realised that helping children to learn was going to be more than just 'difficult'.

During the first observation visits each of the new teachers reported that helping children learn was not easy. Both Khamxing and Tiputai raised the issue that it was difficult work making students understand: *"If my job was just to go to the classroom to teach according to the textbook that would be easy - but the difficulty is that it is hard to make the students understand"* (Khamxing: Visit 4. Interview 2). Similarly, Tiputai, who started off the year with reasonably good classroom management skills and a clear understanding of the textbook content, reported: *"it's not so hard to teach but it's hard to make them understand the lesson"* (Tiputai: Visit 1. Journal Notes).

6.4.1 Some common strategies to help students learn

After the four teachers realised that many of their students did not understand the lessons, they began to try out different strategies to promote learning. These were genuine attempts made by the teachers of their own initiative to improve both their teaching and the student outcomes. By the end of the year, each teacher had developed their own repertoire of strategies, although most of the approaches were tried by more than one of the teachers. The eight most common strategies were: (i) setting and marking homework; (ii) using break times to allow students to catch up; (iii) using non-core subject time to teach literacy and numeracy; (iv) setting tasks according to the abilities of the students; (v) organising students to check

each other's work; (vi) talking to students about the reasons for learning; (vii) talking to parents about their children and enlisting their support; and, (viii) staying in the classroom throughout the whole lesson. Each of these commonly used strategies is now examined.

(i) Setting and marking homework

Setting homework was used both as a way of getting through the textbook and as a strategy to help students learn. Without setting homework, the teachers agreed they would not have been able to finish the textbooks. When the aim was just to get through the textbook, homework involved copying down exercises and returning the work for it to be marked in class by the teacher. However, setting homework to help students learn took up more time and involved three steps. First, the teacher wrote the exercise on the board, the students copied it down and then completed it at home; second, the teacher marked the work; and third, the teacher went over the work on the board. Some of the most effective lessons observed were ones in which the teacher explained problems from the homework. At those times students 'listened to learn'. On some occasions the teacher explained the homework and answers could be changed before the work was collected; on other occasions homework was collected before the explanations were provided. Either way, most students appeared to listen to the teacher during homework correction sessions.

Each of the teachers recalled doing homework themselves, mostly writing or maths exercises. Early in the year Bounyang started to set homework on a regular basis. Seng, Tiputai and Khamxing, came round to seeing value in doing so a bit later. After Visit 2 the teachers reported in their journals that they were setting homework and in the interviews during Visit 3 they reflected on how the strategy helped students who had been absent to catch up. However, often the more enjoyable subjects such as handicraft or sport were sacrificed so there was enough time for copying the homework exercises from the board.

By the last month, before end-of-year exams, homework had stopped and teachers reported feeling tired. Tiputai said she had stopped setting homework a few weeks after Visit 3, because with 70 students in her class she was finding it too time consuming to mark. Seng stopped for different reasons - she reported that now the students spent the afternoons copying work from their textbooks that did not have to be marked and she could sit outside like the other teachers and chat to them (Seng: Visit 4. Journal Notes). The fact that none of the beginning teachers saw other teachers set homework, may have been a further disincentive for continuing with the practice.

(ii) Using break times to allow students to catch up

In Section 6.2.3 copying was described as a dominant teaching strategy - one which the beginning teachers all stated they valued as an effective way to help children learn. Much of their faith in the efficacy of copying stemmed from colleagues who, Seng and Tiputai reported, advised them to make students copy the text so that they had a record of the lesson in their notebooks and something they could read at home. Seng recalled how, when she was at high school, one of her teachers had used the same approach.

It was a common practice for the four teachers to make children copy down work during class time, but it was mainly Seng and Bounyang who kept children in during break times to finish copying or complete other work. Seng's approach was to stand in the doorway so that she could still chat to passing colleagues, but Bounyang sat in the classroom with his students even though no other teachers did this.

Bounyang reported that after a period of uncertainty he decided he had no choice if his slower Grade 1 students were to get through the textbook. By Week 7 of the term he was observed keeping students in during the morning breaks to 'copy' work from the board.[206] He said he did this for the students who needed more time than was available during lessons as well as for any students who had been away and who needed to 'catch up': *"If I don't help them copy and catch up on work, they just misbehave as they can't understand what the rest of the class is doing"* (Bounyang: Visit 3. Interview 2).

Unlike Seng, who gradually abandoned 'catch-up' work, Bounyang remained committed throughout the year to supervising 'catch-up' sessions during breaks. Tiputai and Khamxing, however, were rarely seen organising such work for their students. No one else at their schools did this and during breaks they socialised with their colleagues.

(iii) Using non-core subject time to teach literacy and numeracy

A key problem the beginning teachers had to address was how to help students learn to read and write. At various stages in the year each of the teachers sought out extra time to supplement the scheduled Language lessons. This time was not only during the morning and afternoon breaks but also during times set aside for sport, music, art and handicraft. Each of the teachers often sacrificed these lessons to give students more time to review the Language lessons. Bounyang's official timetable for a week was compared with a record of how the time was actually spent. It showed that over the week an additional four hours of Language

[206] As noted earlier, most of Bounyang's students were still learning to write, so the level of 'copying' was at its most basic.

time was fitted into the week at the expense of other subjects. Bounyang explained his reasons for doing this:

> *When I started I taught according to the textbook and I didn't think about how much the students were learning. After awhile I could see that some of them weren't learning so I changed and started to do more revision before I started a new lesson. I know that doing this has meant not doing so much of the other subjects but it was necessary in order to help students learn to read and write.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 2. Interview 3)

(iv) Setting tasks according to the abilities of the students

While each of the teachers were observed directing easier questions to weaker students, only Bounyang set different work for the slower students, and then only after the first semester. He had heard about this strategy on practicum but it had taken him until the second semester to realise that the students were at different levels and that some could not keep up. He then started to sit his students in ability groups for maths and wrote different problems up on the board for the slower students. None of the other beginning teachers used this approach and when asked about it said they had never heard of such a strategy. Their approach was to walk around the class helping individuals. In some lessons this meant they were helping many students with the same problem and repeating their explanations. The other three teachers did not seem to understand how or why they should sit students in ability groups and how this might help them to use their time more efficiently.

(v) Organising students to check each other's work

After a few months, Seng, Tiputai and Khamxing reported getting the students to check each other's work, especially homework. They had seen this approach on practicum and it was also used by their colleagues at school. Tiputai explained: *"I have started getting students to work in pairs to check each others' dictation tests rather than doing it myself, as I believe it makes them remember their mistakes"* (Tiputai: Journal. Week 19).

The three teachers were observed correcting work on the board and then letting their students use the corrections to check their partner's answers. This, they said, saved them time and helped their students remember. Khamxing used this approach after he became responsible for two classes but struggled to share his time equally between them. He explained that getting the students involved with checking gave him more time to get through other lessons. The strategy was one commonly used by most teachers across the schools, particularly with Grade 3 students and above.

(vi) Talking to students about the reasons for learning

Each of the beginning teachers, although to different degrees, were heard talking to their students about the value of learning, and Bounyang and Tiputai regularly told their students stories about their own schooling. Often these talks would end in questions to check that the students had been listening.

> *Bounyang stopped the lesson as no one seemed to be listening and started to talk: 'When I was a student there was no electricity or television but I could read - so why is it you have electricity but you can't read? When I was young we had to come to the board. If a student wrote the wrong answer the teacher told one of the other students who could write it correctly to wipe chalk all over the face of the other student. Nowadays we don't do that so don't be afraid of the teacher but listen to the teacher. If I compare to when I was young I was better than you are now because when we had a break I used to read my book and not play around.' Bounyang picked up the textbooks which he was about to give out and asked: 'So what are you going to do with the book when I give it to you?' to which everyone replied, 'Read it'*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 2. Journal Notes)

Tiputai gave similar admonishments to her students, often ending by asking students if they wanted to be looked down on because they couldn't read. When asked why she gave these talks, she recalled how one of her secondary teachers had talked this way when she was at school: *"If I talk to them it will remind them and they will learn and maybe they can improve themselves – it's better than not saying anything"* (Tiputai. Visit 3: Interview 2).

While still exhorting them to learn, Seng, Tiputai and Bounyang all used humour and generally talked encouragingly to their students. However, Khamxing adopted the more serious tone encouraged by the principal of his school. In what amounted to self-criticism sessions[207] Khamxing used Friday afternoons to make the students talk about their own behaviour at school:

> *Each week I focus on different students and ask them to tell the class why they are like this, then I get the rest of the class to compare and discuss what those students are like. The purpose of this is to get the students to see why some of them can learn and why others can't. I want the weak students to hear how to learn from the strong students.*
>
> (Khamxing: Visit 3. Interview 3)

[207] See Khamkeo (2008) for a first-person account of the self-criticism sessions that many thousands of Lao were forced to undergo in the re-education camps, or *samanya*, set up in remote parts of the country after the 1975 revolution.

(vii) Talking to parents about their children and enlisting their support

Schooling, for most parents born during the American War[208] years or during the post-revolution reconstruction period from 1975 to 1985, was either non-existent, or at best 'interrupted'. The majority of the parents in the four villages in this study were farmers and were still to be convinced of the value of regularly sending their children to school. In an effort to improve school participation rates, some government programs were targeted at the parents.[209] However, it was mainly the public rhetoric of the village heads and school principals urging support for the school that was heard.

Communication between staff and parents at the four schools was largely informal. Sometimes parents met the teachers at a village ceremony and asked about their children but in general contact was only made, if at all, after a prolonged absence by a student. None of the schools had formal procedures for communicating with parents. Although the teachers said they sometimes spoke to parents about a child's attendance, none of the four teachers reported having discussed a child's progress at length with a parent. Monthly and end-of-semester test results were posted up on the classroom walls but it was up to the students to report these back to their parents.

During the interviews Bounyang and Tiputai both spoke of the need to improve communication with the parents. However, although Tiputai claimed such communication was important, she admitted doing so infrequently *"because of the time it takes to track the parents down"* (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 3). Bounyang also believed communication with parents was important:

> *The difference between rural schools and town schools is that in town the parents help their children. Here I just started giving out homework but the parents aren't used to helping their children. I have talked to some of the parents about checking that their children do their homework. I know that for many of the children it's the first time they have ever brought work home and so I want the parents to try and encourage them.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 4)

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208 See Chapter 1, Footnote 12.

209 For example the *Second Education Quality Improvement Program* (EQIP II) (MoE, 2005a). Component 2.2.1 reads: *"Community members from all target areas in the project districts will take part in three days of annual training to develop school and community plans to increase the quality of teaching and learning and increase participation in education in their schools, especially among girls and ethnic minorities"* (p. 47).

During the third visit Tiputai expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of direct communication the school had with parents. She pointed out that most parents in her village had limited schooling and did not understand what was involved in learning. None of the teachers said they felt confident to suggest their ideas for improving communication with parents to the principal; however, Tiputai spoke privately of what she would do if she had the authority:

> *If I were a principal I would invite the parents to come to school to tell them the importance of education and not just tell the heads of the village work groups. I would like to show a video of a successful person who has been to school and who can explain how school helped them to succeed.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 2)

(viii) <u>*Staying in the classroom throughout the whole lesson*</u>

In her first interview Tiputai spoke about what she had heard from a friend:

> *My friend rang and told me that the older teachers at his school go into the classroom and write the topic on the board and tell the students to study that lesson in the textbook. Then they walk outside and after awhile they come back and ask if they can understand, and if they can't answer, they punish them! He asked me if that happens at my school and I said 'No'.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 1. Interview 1)

While most people would assume that during lessons the teacher stays in the classroom as a matter of course, this was not always the case in some of the schools in the study. Although Tiputai told her friend that such things did not happen in her school, in fact she was soon reporting that she frequently saw her colleagues setting work on the board and then walking outside to sit and chat. This was also Seng's experience who explained indignantly: *"At least I stay in the classroom near the students so they can see me. Then if they need me I can help them to complete the tasks"* (Seng: Visit 2. Interview 2).

During my observational visits I saw myself that teachers often strolled outside during class time and socialised while their students copied work from the board. In Bounyang's case, he was, on numerous occasions, the only teacher at school.[210] But when he was not in his own classroom he was next door settling other students and was never observed resting outside during lessons. Khamxing was also always with one or other of his classes. Along with the two other young teachers at his school, he taught under the watchful gaze of a principal who kept a check on his staff from a small room, built on stilts and located next to

[210] See Appendix 1, Case Record 1.

the classrooms. Most of the time these three young teachers walked around the room ensuring that students were doing their work and stopping to provide assistance as needed. The option to join the others outside was a choice that Seng, Tiputai and Bounyang all had, but one they all consciously rejected in the interests of their students. This, then, was a chosen teaching strategy.

Later in the year, both Seng and Tiputai admitted that when I was not present, they, too, had started to come into class a bit late, preferring to stay outside chatting with the other teachers. Although they each said that this was not appropriate behaviour for a professional teacher, it seemed that they had, in part, given in to the pressure to conform. By Visit 3 Tiputai explained: "*It's difficult not to behave like everyone else"* (Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 2), and by the end of the year she reiterated her concern: *"If I am not friendly and I just stay in my classroom, then maybe the others might talk about me and then there would not be a good feeling between us"* (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 1). Staying in the classroom and working to help the children learn may not seem like much of a teaching strategy, but it was an issue for the beginning teachers. While Khamxing with his watchful principal had no choice in the matter, by the end of the year both Seng and Tiputai had partially abandoned their earlier position, and only Bounyang appeared to have maintained the strategy and his professional integrity.

6.4.2 Summary

The key reason the teachers attempted to use the strategies described above was to see if their students would make some progress. As Bounyang explained: *"it would be easy just to put up their marks like I am encouraged to do, but I want to see these children really being able to read and write"* (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 1). However, despite drawing on a range of strategies to help their students, the actual level of student achievement by the end of the year was significantly lower than that suggested by the marks awarded in end-of-year exams.[211] This claim was checked in the final interviews when the four teachers were asked to report on the number of students who achieved a pass mark or better in the end-of-year Language exam compared to the number of students who could read the last page of their Language text book unassisted. The responses are shown in Table 6.13; the figures speak for themselves.

[211] Similar situations were discussed in private by all the beginning teachers but none felt confident to raise the matter in public.

Table 6.13: Number and percentage of students in beginning teachers' classes who passed the end-of-year Lao Language exam compared to the number and percentage who could read the last page of their Lao Language textbook unassisted

Teacher	Number of students in class	Students who passed the end-of-year Lao Language exam	Students who could read the last page of their Lao Language textbook unassisted
		number (%)	number (%)
Bounyang	61	43 (70%)	8 (13%)
Tiputai	69	60 (87%)	15 (21%)
Khamxing	36	33 (93%)	20 (55%)
Seng	30	21(70%)	10 (33%)
Totals	**196**	**157 (80%)**	**53 (27%)**

Each teacher tried a range of strategies to help children learn, but by the end of the year they had all exhausted their ideas of what to do. On several occasions I was asked for ideas about what they should do, and towards the end of the year these requests became more frequent.[212] Bounyang reported that he did not know what else to do: *"I tried what was suggested in the teachers' guide and followed the textbook but they still didn't learn"* (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 2). Khamxing on the other hand, talked about the need to help 'weak' students but his deeds did not always follow his words, and of the four teachers, he was the one who tried the smallest number of strategies to assist children's learning. During the final visit he admitted that he had not helped his students as much as he would have liked, but said he had felt *"overwhelmed"* in the second semester when he was told to teach two classes – a fairly understandable reaction for anyone.

Seng complained that while the teacher's guides showed how to execute the lessons, they gave no direction about how to teach children who could not do the work. She requested more training so as to develop a better understanding of how to manage students' behaviour.

[212] The issue of responding to requests for advice is discussed in Chapter 3. At the end of the school year, after my last visit to the villages, a five-day "Beginning Teacher Re-Call Workshop" was organised at the Pakse TTC for 30 teachers, including the four who participated in this study. This was organised, in part, to give something back to the four teachers, now no longer beginners, who had given so much of themselves to me and this study. The content of the workshop was based on both the questions which I had received throughout the year and had delayed answering, along with commonly observed problems which I had seen the teachers grappling with. Some suggested ways of dealing with the issues were provided by myself and the lecturers from the pre-service program.

And finally, Tiputai, after showing such great promise in her teaching at the beginning, ended her year on a negative note. In the last visit, and giving an overall impression of being disillusioned, she explained how her teaching had changed:

> *As you saw at the beginning of the year, I tried to observe what individual students could do and tried to focus on helping them to learn, but now I don't do that anymore because even when I did that I didn't see much improvement. I stopped because of the way the other teachers are and because I am just so tired.*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 3)

6.5 The Professional Needs of Beginning Teachers

Listening to the beginning teachers talk and seeing what enthused them about their work as well as what made them despondent, provides a good point from which to start on the design of a program for teacher support. This section draws on the evidence presented in the first four sections of the chapter, as well as on evidence from Chapters 4 and 5, to identify the professional development needs of the beginning teachers. As the year progressed and challenges were encountered the teachers themselves reappraised the value of their pre-service course and spoke more openly of what they thought could make a difference to their teaching.

Shortly after starting work, each of the beginning teachers recounted feeling totally unprepared for the reality they now faced – such things as large class sizes, students who came from families in which no one was literate, Grade 1 students who had never been to pre-school and classes with an extremely broad range of ability levels. By the third round of visits the new teachers were also expressing regret at not having learnt more in the pre-service course. Tiputai's reaction was typical:

> *If I had known last year that I was going to have a class of 70 I would have asked the lecturers: 'How is it possible to manage the learning of all the students, especially when they have different abilities?' I wonder if they could have answered me?*
>
> (Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 3)

Although the teachers soon became acquainted with their colleagues they found few opportunities to talk with them about pedagogical problems. The teachers' problems stemmed from not just having to teach the textbook lessons but having to teach the textbooks to classes in which there were a wide range of abilities. On top of this, they also realized that their understandings of learner-centred methods were poorly developed - it was much easier to

resort to 'talk and chalk', the type of education they had experienced at school and which was practised around them. Each of them reported that they had had few opportunities in their pre-service course to see these 'modern' methods in practice and were now unsure how to proceed. Even when they tried to use the methods their students, used to a more didactic way of teaching, became difficult to manage. At various times they all complained that there should have been more opportunities for seeing learner-centred methods in practice while they were training.

The four teachers were also struggling with the core skills of explaining, questioning and managing classroom behaviour. They spoke of drawing on some of the practices they remembered from their own schooling and on ideas they heard about during their course. However, by the end of the year they all knew that these techniques alone were insufficient to help their students learn. Bounyang appealed directly for help with teaching his Grade 1 children to read:

> *At the TTC we were taught to read to the children, to let them read to us, and to let them practise. However, we rarely saw teachers teaching children and we weren't taught how to use activities or games to make reading interesting. I didn't know what to do when I started except to follow what I had been taught and even though I did this, many of my students still can't read.*
>
> (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 3)

Another disappointment for the beginning teachers was that only the principal, but no other teachers had observed them at work and this translated into feelings of 'professional isolation'. Each person talked about wanting to know whether what they were doing was 'right' but it was only informally through open doors and windows that they were able to observe and be observed by their colleagues. And on rare occasions a colleague might tell them that they were doing 'okay'. Bounyang, however, rationalised it all away: "*It seems to me that if no one talks to me about the way I am teaching then I am probably doing an acceptable job"* (Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 2).

At the end of the year, the four teachers were asked how they thought beginning teachers should be supported. A common position was that all staff have a role to play in helping new teachers learn about teaching by offering pedagogical advice and by inviting beginning teachers to observe them teaching. The teachers' comments on feeling professionally isolated at various times during the year are reflected in Tiputai's remarks below:

If a new teacher comes next year and asks for suggestions I will tell them what I know and what I am confident about… I will not ignore them ... not like with me this year ... it was hard to get anyone to talk to me about teaching.

(Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 2)

Khamxing claimed that it was in the principal's interest to build up the skills of the whole staff as a 'weak' teacher would affect student learning and also the work of other teachers:

Each teacher's students move onto a different grade in the following year, so students of weak teachers are passed on to the next teacher. We need to help each other to solve the teaching problems which we are facing and that means talking together.

(Khamxing: Visit 4. Interview 4)

With few opportunities to discuss pedagogical matters, the beginning teachers were observed 'getting on' with surviving and working towards their goal of achieving permanency. When asked to consider how they would help new teachers themselves, their answers coalesced into what could be called 'developing collegiality', one focused on shared engagement, on mutual observation, and on opportunities to discuss teaching. Tiputai's response to reading the national teacher competencies reveals the kind of collegial involvement from which each of the beginning teachers could have benefitted. When I showed Tiputai the *National Charter of Teacher Competencies* (MoE, 2007a) she told me it was the first time she had seen them. After reading through the list of 30 competencies she remarked:

Looking at these I can say that I could possibly implement them. But to be honest it's really impossible in my situation - I think I could implement them but I don't think the other teachers could and then it's no good if only one teacher does these things - everyone has to be involved.

(Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 5)

This comment highlights a key finding that the beginning teachers all reported a need to work with the rest of the staff. Even when the new teacher possessed enthusiasm, knowledge and skills, if these attributes were not encouraged or sanctioned by other members of staff, the beginning teacher tended to either put them aside, or leave them for the privacy of their own classrooms. In the final interviews focussed on the kind of help they still needed, the teachers suggested opportunities to talk with others who were knowledgeable about specific problems, such as the TTC lecturers. They also suggested a chance to meet with other young teachers to

discuss the kinds of problems they had experienced and to hear about the strategies which they had employed to deal with them.

To begin the design of a teacher support program it is important that first the classroom practices of the teachers have been observed and that their opinions and concerns have been listened to. As shown in the literature review there is also general agreement that programs need to be tailored to suit the cultural, economic and political circumstances of the teachers.[213] These issues are taken up in the final chapter when recommendations for addressing the professional needs of beginning teachers, through a program responsive to local conditions, is put forward.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the professional practices adopted by four beginning teachers over their first year of teaching have been examined and contrasted. Changes in their practices were either reported in journals, directly observed in class, or spoken of during interviews. The personal repertoire of teaching strategies each teacher assembled drew on a range of sources including their own school experiences, their pre-service course, the examples and advice of colleagues, and their observations of 'what worked'. However, in common, they found that teaching brought with it formidable challenges.

Like the large majority of other beginning teachers in Laos, these teachers commenced work with no job security in unpaid 'volunteer' positions. If permanency and a salary was to be secured, it was essential to get on with the principal and other staff. Evidence has been presented that from this position of powerlessness the teachers undertook whatever was asked of them from completing the textbook no matter what, to uncomplainingly teaching additional classes.

The four teachers reported that while their colleagues helped them with administrative tasks, they could not count on them for pedagogical support. Although at first they had talked of asking older teachers for help, once in their schools this resolve faded. Bounyang's principal had commented that the new teacher should already know about teaching because he had *"just completed college" (Visit 4. Interview 1),* and Khamxing believed that if he asked too many questions *"they might think that I didn't learn anything in College"* (Khamxing: Visit 1. Interview 2). Meanwhile Tiputai reported asking questions about teaching only to

[213] See Section 2.2.8.

have them quietly avoided. Through a process of observation and self-censorship the beginning teachers learnt not only what questions to ask but also when not to ask them.

In the professionally isolated environment of small rural schools, where few of the experienced teachers even attempted to use learner-centred methods, the beginning teachers nonetheless tried to action what they had been taught in their course. However, the insubstantial knowledge that the beginning teachers had of such methods made their implementation problematic and their sustainability unlikely, especially as the young teachers were already under social and cultural pressure. As the year progressed, the learner-centred methods which were attempted, were gradually put aside. Only Bounyang persevered with trying to implement methods which he, himself, had never seen in practice.

Towards the end of the year, copying and traditional teaching practices dominated the classrooms of the beginning teachers. The teachers no longer asked questions of their colleagues nor discussed with others how to help children learn. Instead they got on with 'teaching the textbook'. Privately, however, they admitted that the progress of their students was poor and they each expressed doubt about the effectiveness of even these traditional strategies they were using to help children learn. They spoke of wanting to learn more about teaching reading, doing maths, managing behaviour and designing relevant local curricula. As young teachers they were still concerned with student learning and with the development of their own teaching practices.

During the final interviews, the four teachers spoke of *"trials", "challenges" and "survival"* but still described their teaching as "*no worse"* than that of others in the school. However, they also admitted being unsure about the *"best"* ways to help children learn and requested external advice on how to improve their teaching. They also privately expressed their own ideas about ways that they, as new teachers, could have been supported on arrival in their schools.

The last two chapters have focused on descriptions of context and on accounts of how the beginning teachers coped with the demands of teaching and developed their personal practice. The next chapter discusses these findings and elaborates on the nature of the workplace and its influence on the evolving teaching practices of the four beginning teachers.

CHAPTER 7. REALITY: COMPLIANCE AND COMPROMISE

> *The experience of becoming a teacher needs to be acknowledged for what it is: complex and demanding*.
>
> Fuller and Bown, 1975, p. 50

7.0 Introduction

This study is focused on understanding the professional lives of beginning teachers working in rural primary schools in Laos. The research commenced with an examination of the pre-service experiences of a cohort of trainee-teachers enrolled in a one-year diploma at the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC), and their expectations of teaching as a career (Chapter 4). This was followed by an exploration of the contextual factors which influenced the practice of four of these trainees, when after graduation they commenced work as beginning teachers (Chapter 5). The study then moved into the classroom where the shifting practices of the teachers were examined over the space of a school year and their needs for professional development and support were identified (Chapter 6).

The purpose of Chapter 7 is now to discuss the findings presented in the last three chapters within the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Of particular note is Wenger's (1998) well known construct of a 'community of practice'. Related concepts of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), 'guided participation' and 'participatory appropriation' (Rogoff, 1995) are also utilised to discuss the developmental process of 'becoming a teacher'. The discussion incorporates a 'multifocal' view (Borko, 2004) that seeks to keep in focus both the personal background, skills and beliefs of the individual, as well as a societal view of the individual engaged with others in the workplace. In doing so, the second and third research questions are again addressed:

- *What is the nature of the professional experiences beginning teachers have during their first year of teaching?*
- *In what ways and to what extent do beginning teachers develop their teaching practices during their first year of teaching?*

Section 7.1 of the current chapter examines the pre-service program that the beginning teachers undertook and judgments are made about its suitability for preparing teachers to work in rural primary schools in Laos. Section 7.2 explores how the beginning teachers were 'inducted' into the professional practices of the workplace. Like all new teachers everywhere, the four teachers in this study were faced with a variety of difficulties, both large and small, as they adapted to their new roles. However, there were five main confronting issues, or

'dilemmas' as they are referred to, that they all encountered and which challenged their ideas of what it is to be a teacher. The nature and causes of these dilemmas are examined in Section 7.3, while the strategies the beginning teachers employed, with varying degrees of success, to try and resolve them are discussed in Section 7.4. The concept of a 'community of practice' and its applicability within the schools involved in the study is explored in Section 7.5 while Section 7.6 provides an overall summary of the chapter.

7.1 Limitations of the Pre-service Program

The 11+1 pre-service program run at the Pakse TTC from which the four beginning teachers graduated, can safely be called a traditional model of teacher preparation.[214] The findings in Chapter 4 of the views the trainees held of their pre-service course revealed several areas of dissatisfaction. Three of the most commonly raised concerns were (i) a lack of opportunity to observe a range of teaching methodologies; (ii) an expectation by the cooperating teachers that the trainees would teach all day while on practicum; and, (iii) a lack of feedback from the lecturers and the cooperating teachers to the trainees concerning their teaching performance during practicum. By contrast, while several TTC lecturers commented during interviews that the 11+1 course was too short, there was a general acceptance by them that the course was nonetheless adequately training young people to take on the task of teaching textbook lessons to a diverse range of students using 'modern teaching pedagogies'.[215] These statements were made even though there was no mechanism in place to canvas the schools about the quality of the graduates the College was producing nor to track their work as teachers. By 2008 when the observations in the TTC were being undertaken for this study, planning for an additional year of course work was well underway. However, a senior lecturer in the TTC commented during Stage 3 of the research that the review had resulted in *"no genuine overhaul of the course structure",* but rather, that the new 11+2 course, scheduled for implementation in 2009-2010, would simply be just *"more of the same"* (Personal communication, July 2010).[216]

As the beginning teachers experienced the reality of classroom teaching they were able to identify and reflect on aspects of their training which they felt could have been improved. Observations of their teaching provided another avenue for judging how well the pre-service

[214] See Section 4.2 for a descriptions of the program structure and the various subjects which the course offered.

[215] As described earlier, in Section 2.1.5 these 'modern teaching pedagogies' are often glossed within Lao education circles as the '5-pointed star approach' which includes the five principles of (i) activities; (ii) group work; (iii) teaching aids and concrete materials; (iv) questioning; and, (v) relevance to daily life.

[216] For example, at the time of writing, while the newly developed 12+2 course has brought in some new subjects, it still retains the same length and structure for practicum as in the former 11+1 course.

program had prepared its graduates for the task ahead of them. This section now discusses these findings in the light of what is known about effective teacher education practices.

7.1.1 Limited acknowledgement of the personal histories of trainee-teachers

After experiencing 11 years of didactic teaching during their own schooling, the trainees arrived at the TTC having completed an 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975). Interviews held with trainee-teachers at the College revealed that they commonly remembered their own schooling as a time of listening to the teachers, of copying work from the board and of working alone to complete tasks set by the teacher. One trainee noted that throughout her high school years she had never been asked a question by any of her teachers. Equally surprising, were the reports that showed that only a few of the trainees had ever experienced working in groups prior to coming to the TTC (see Chapter 4).

From my own observations over a six month period of the trainees' course, and from interviews with trainees while they were studying in the TTC, it was apparent that there were very few opportunities for them to analyse or reflect on their own school experiences or to allow them to make the link between their own learning and the new pedagogical approaches which they believed they would be expected to implement when they commenced work. The value of getting trainee-teachers to reflect on their previous learning experiences and on their beliefs about how children learn was first promoted in developed contexts by Goodson (1992) and later used by Bullough and Gitlin (2001). The approach has also been successfully used in Ghana (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002) where trainee-teachers discussed their own learning experiences and their beliefs about how children learn and then examined the implications of using less didactic approaches in the classroom. Unfortunately no such approach was used during the training of the four beginning teachers in this study.

7.1.2 A lack of attention to authentic problems

In the pre-service course each subject was taught from a textbook, and by their own admission the lecturers involved were primarily focused on completing each of the lessons in the relevant books. Moreover, with respect to the practicum, which was held at the end of the course, the trainees reported that little time was devoted to analysing, or even just discussing their experiences. Except for end-of-year post-practicum meetings, they had no opportunity in their pre-service course to discuss solutions to the common problems they had encountered with their lecturers. While the post-practicum meetings were talked about by lecturing staff as having this very purpose, the trainees stated that only two of their lecturers actually used the

meetings as an opportunity for discussing practicum problems. In the four days of *post*-practicum meetings which I observed, most of the lecturers used the time simply for listening to the trainees report back individually on their practicum experiences rather than giving the trainees feedback on their performance or leading whole class discussions which critiqued the practicum.

From the classroom observations and interviews presented in Section 6.2, the beginning teachers appeared aware of the links between the difficulty of the work being set by them and classroom behaviour problems, but they also appeared to be devoid of strategies with which to solve these problems. On many occasions the beginning teachers, simply allowed students who had no chance of completing the work to just sit and chat quietly while they waited for answers to be put up on the board that they could then copy down. This lack of engagement in the lesson sometimes resulted in disruptive behavior to which the beginning teachers reacted with threats of punishment. A second major challenge for the beginning teachers, which was not addressed in their training course, was the issue of testing and the utilisation of the results for further teaching. Upon starting work the beginning teachers soon realised that the main reason for the insistence upon monthly testing was to report on students' progress (not necessarily accurately) rather than for use as a diagnostic tool for reviewing work or re-teaching concepts.

7.1.3 A lack of opportunity for targeted observations and analysis

There is an extensive literature which makes a case for providing trainee-teachers with opportunities to observe others and focus on specific pedagogical practices which are modeled and interwoven with course work (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In the TTC program, however, there were no opportunities during the course for trainees to observe specifically targeted pedagogical practices or to make reflective judgments as to what constitutes 'quality' teaching. In fact, even on practicum only some of the trainees were able to observe cooperating teachers in the classroom before having to teach themselves. Many reported having never observed, either on practicum or at the TTC, the use of the modern, learner-centred pedagogical strategies advocated by their lecturers such as group work, the use of concrete materials, or how to make the lessons relate to the real lives of the students. These findings bring to mind Darling-Hammond's (2006) question of how teachers can be expected to learn what is required of them when they are never provided in their training with opportunities to see what it is that is being talked about.

Ball and Cohen (1999) have argued that teachers do not change their practices by simply being told what to do, but need opportunities to examine practices with others. This problem is described in other studies conducted in developing countries (Wideen, *et al*., 1998). Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006) assert that lecturers should both model the types of practices which teachers are expected to use in their classrooms as well as talk about the reasons why they are used. While observations at the TTC showed that group work and teaching aids were used by some of the lecturers, interviews with the trainees revealed that lecturers never explicitly demonstrated how particular teaching strategies could be used with children. At the end of her first year of teaching, one of the beginning teachers suggested that she would have liked her lecturers to visit her classroom to see how they would have solved the problems which she was experiencing. She acknowledged that her lecturers had used group work with the trainees at the TTC, but stressed how different that was to getting ten-year old children to work productively in groups especially when she had 70 students.

7.1.4 Limitations of practicum

Instead of practicum providing trainees with a guided exposure to the teaching practices discussed in their course work, this study found that practicum was more an opportunity for students to gain 'work experience'. In this sense, while this time in schools did provide the trainees with the experience of what it was like to teach all day, everyday, it did not provide them with opportunities for 'practice' alongside 'knowledgeable others'. Loughran, Brown and Doecke (2001) argue that practicum should not just be a socialization into real teaching but rather should be used mainly as a time for preparing teachers for teaching. In this study, however, the reverse was observed with the trainees having a high level of exposure to the realities of teaching. The only difference to 'real work' was that there was no requirement to undertake administrative duties, a task which they would only encounter when they arrived in their own classrooms and one which would cause them significant stress in their first weeks in the job.

The study also found that practicum did not help the trainees find out about the learner-centred methods which had been highlighted in the TTC course. In fact, the trainees reported having had limited opportunities for any kind of observation of teaching practices during the practicum. They also reported receiving limited advice from the cooperating teachers about how to deal with classroom problems and were simply encouraged to complete each of the textbook lessons. The lack of professional advice from the cooperating teachers indicated their own need for professional support. It also indicates that trainees would have benefitted

from college lecturers making visits to schools which allowed them to make observations of whole lessons delivered by trainees, rather than the brief monitoring visits which were made during the research period.

Eraut's (2000) call for trainee-teachers to be placed in schools where there are positive commitments to teaching is a commendable aim, but one which is difficult to achieve even in developed contexts (Loughran *et al.,* 2001). In Laos, with many trainees needing a practicum placement each year, the main criteria by which schools were selected was simply agreement to be involved. Due to budget restrictions there were no professional development opportunities for classroom teachers to help them work more effectively alongside the trainees and no visits to the schools by the lecturers. This resulted in the trainees having to wait until the post-practicum meetings to receive advice about their concerns from their College lecturers.

Many of the limitations of practicum reported in this study correspond with reports found in the MUSTER studies conducted in Africa by Lewin and Stuart (2003). There the findings illustrate the enormous challenges that a practicum component presents to teacher training institutions when funds are limited and where the practices in local classrooms have not 'caught up' with the policy and practices advocated by the colleges. To reduce this gap it is not only more resources that are required but also the political will to ensure that substantial and sustained collaboration occurs between the schools and colleges – neither being a condition that was witnessed in this study. Instead of a longer practicum a more worthwhile option to consider could be to maintain its length but focus the practicum on specific goals.

7.1.5 Summary

As the four teachers progressed through their first year of teaching they raised recurring questions during the interviews about how to help children learn. These questions indicated that their course had inadequately prepared them for the experiences they encountered in the workplace. After they started work, the four teachers explained that the pre-service experience had not only left them with a lack of confidence about how to implement learner-centred teaching methods, but also had not equipped them with a sufficient understanding of how to engage students in learning using traditional practices. As one beginning teacher explained when I visited him at his new school "*they told us what to do but rarely showed us how to do it*". Observations of their teaching over a year showed that none of the beginning teachers had more than a limited repertoire of skills and strategies to help their students learn. This points to the need for course improvement in the teacher training institutions including the

professional development of the teacher educators and the development of more collaboration between schools and the colleges.

These limitations of pre-service teacher education courses are not unique to Laos. McGrath (2008) comments on the situation of teacher education in a number of other developing countries:[217]

> *Many of the main approaches taken to teacher development are failing to deal with the complexity of teachers' knowledge, work and identity and lack sufficient grasp of the nature of change processes and the way that these are mediated by cultural, political and economic environments.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 3)

Some suggestions as to how pre-service education program can be adjusted to better meet the needs of teachers as they embrace the reality of the workplace are presented in the final chapter of this thesis.

7.2 Teaching Practices of Beginning Teachers

Like many others starting out in professional life, the four young people at the centre of this study held high ideals and aspirations for themselves and their careers. During interviews conducted prior to graduation they acknowledged that they wanted to help *"develop their country"* and explained that a key responsibility of being a teacher was *"caring for children"* (see Section 4.1). By mapping the way these four teachers adapted their teaching practices to accommodate the realities they encountered, the study illustrates how the practices of 'new-comers' are forged in the fires of experience.

As discussed in Section 2.3.4, Lave and Wenger (1991) contend that it is through 'situated learning' that individuals acquire knowledge and skills as they participate alongside others in carrying out authentic tasks embedded in the workplace. The process which they call 'legitimate peripheral participation' gives rise to learning which is acquired gradually and cumulatively. From this perspective the new teachers are supported by more experienced teachers to learn the expected practices of the workplace and become part of the 'community of practice'.

A stereotypical depiction of teachers is of individuals working in isolation in their own classrooms with their own students (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), and indeed, the four beginning

[217] The countries involved in the study were Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey, Jordan, Vietnam, China and Taiwan.

teachers all, at different times over the year, both worked this way and reported feeling a sense of 'professional isolation'. However, this depiction fails to acknowledge the significant involvement many teachers have in 'joint enterprises' with colleagues, as was the case for these beginning teachers. Typical 'joint enterprises' seen across the four schools in which the whole staff were 'mutually engaged', include the daily flag raising assembly, planning and implementing a whole school activity such as a cultural festival, and working together to prepare the overall school calendar. The staff also worked collectively to complete reports which were sent off to the DEB each month. These, and similar tasks, acted to ameliorate the beginning teachers' sense of professional isolation even if they did not totally extinguish the feeling.

While the beginning teachers worked in such joint enterprises with all staff, they were guided primarily by the example of their senior colleagues and the principal to reproduce the existing practices. If the beginning teachers were to avoid social isolation they had to 'fit in'. There was no evidence here of a transformative process but rather of a process that worked to reproduce the practices expected by their colleagues and by the District Education Bureau (DEB) bureaucracy. Beginning teachers both wanted to belong, but also needed to belong if they were to be successful in achieving their goal of permanency. In order do this and gain acceptance as a member of staff the beginning teachers worked with their colleagues, participated in the same activities and events, used the same tools, followed the examples set for them and observed their practices. In doing so their professional identity as a 'volunteer teacher', and therefore as the most junior member of staff, was established.

In a well-known study Lacey (1977) talks of a 'honeymoon stage' afforded to beginning teachers as they are slowly eased into teaching and all that that entails. No such luxury was afforded to the four beginning teachers in this study. From 'day one' they participated in the same kinds of activities as the most experienced teachers in the school and were expected to complete the same tasks as the rest of the staff. For example, by the seventh week of term each of the four beginning teachers had drawn up a yearly plan and two one-monthly plans, had conducted two one-monthly cycles of testing and had reported the results of all these labours to the principal. Furthermore, not only had they taught their own classes, but to varying degrees, had been called upon to 'mind' the classes of their colleagues, several of them to an outrageous extent[218] ... and all without pay. As they struggled to complete their assigned administrative tasks, to get to know the abilities of their own students and to teach

[218] This, of course, is from the perspective of the foreign 'outsider' without consideration of the network of factors underpinning what appeared to be standard practice. The issue is taken up again in Section 7.3.1.

accordingly, and often to take on an additional inherited teaching load from a colleague, the beginning teachers were caught up in and overwhelmed by the double task of 'teaching' and 'learning to be a teacher' (Wildman *et al*., 1989). These initial weeks were an intensive time for the beginning teachers. As they listened to advice and observed the practices of their colleagues they were intent on doing what was expected of them. In interviews they talked about the guidance they received (both explicit and implicit) to undertake the administrative tasks. Accordingly they were observed appropriating the practices of their colleagues as they came to an understanding about what was acceptable in terms of administrative practices.

With the focus in the schools squarely upon 'teaching the textbook', and lacking the confidence to deviate too far from the scope and sequence of the books, the beginning teachers looked to their colleagues to see how this directive could be achieved. They soon saw that the practices in the schools were dominated by the traditional teaching methods (see Section 6.2) such as explaining to the whole group, instructing children to copy from the board, and having the children complete tasks individually. The fact that such practices were reminiscent of their own schooling simply served to affirm their validity as acceptable and appropriate methods, and any plans the beginning teachers had of introducing a learner-centred pedagogy of the type they had heard of during their training, quickly dissipated. Although they were observed, in large measure, adopting these accepted practices, it was not done without a degree of reservation. The finding reported earlier in this thesis that the practices of the beginning teachers shifted from experimentation with learner-centred methods to a traditional approach to teaching (see Section 6.3), is consistent with the studies in Chapter 2 which describe a 'wash-out' of the ideas and knowledge gained in pre-service education courses once teachers start work in schools (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985; Rust, 1994; Tafa, 2004). The appropriation of surrounding practices was gradual as different teachers adopted different practices at different times (see Chapter 6). By the end of the year though, three of the four beginning teachers were generally teaching like the rest of the staff in their school.

In this study, the observed 'wash-out' of pre-service ideas and knowledge took a slightly different path to that described in the studies cited above. It became apparent across the year that the teaching methods which the beginning teachers had earlier nurtured and then seemingly abandoned, occasionally resurfaced. Teaching methods learnt during training and designated as 'modern pedagogy' or 'learner-centred' were now reserved for 'show', for example when a teacher was being videoed or when teaching in front of the DEB inspectors during one of their irregular visits. Such 'performance' has been observed by Steinmuller

(2011) in China and identified by him as a 'face-saving' exercise with 'insiders' complicit in constructing an image tailored to suit the assumed expectations of the 'outsiders'.

While the beginning teachers reported feeling unconfident to implement many of the 'modern' ideas from their pre-service course in their classrooms, on the one occasion when I saw DEB staff on an inspectorial visit, the beginning teacher I was observing at the time quickly began to incorporate 'learner-centred' techniques into the lesson that was underway. Groups sprang up where none had been seen for four or five days; and the board was used to draw a picture that related to the lesson instead of the normal pattern of focusing solely on the textbook. And for the lessons that the teachers knew in advance were going to be videoed, attempts were usually made to include at least one 'modern' method. Sadly, however, these were obviously performances – and most of them not very good.

An analysis of videoed lessons showed that the central problem appeared to be that the teacher did not really understand the purpose of each technique. For example, teaching aids were held up by the teacher but rarely touched by the students; group work involved splitting the class up and arranging students to sit together in groups but then not engaging them in any authentic group work tasks; and the same students were repeatedly selected by the teacher to report back on the lesson.

From the lessons I observed over the year, it was clear that when each beginning teacher decided that 'performance lessons' were no longer required they reverted to the everyday grind of the traditional strategies advocated and practised by their colleagues. These traditional strategies allowed them to manage the students and get on with the central task of completing the textbooks. In an allied practice two of the beginning teachers explained how, before submitting their lesson plans to the DEB, they sometimes 'adjusted' them after the fact so as to include 'modern' pedagogical practices such as group work or learning activities.

Although the beginning teachers adopted the pedagogical practices of the experienced teachers they did not do so without expressed misgivings. Through a process of guided participation by their colleagues, they learnt how to undertake the administrative tasks required of them. In like fashion they were also made aware of how to transfer the textbook knowledge to students in the time available. However, the beginning teachers could also see that many of their students were not learning and they were aware of a discord between their own evolving educational beliefs and the practices of their more experienced colleagues. At times, therefore, there was a reluctance to adopt the practices that surrounded them. The next

section discusses the resultant dilemmas all four beginning teachers experienced as they struggled to fit their beliefs to the advocated practices they found themselves adopting.

7.3 Dilemmas of Beginning Teachers

Lave and Wenger (1991) contend that within any shared participatory practice, conflict occurs when "*differing viewpoints and common stakes are in interplay*" (p. 116) – typically a struggle between newcomers and old-timers. But from the interviews and observations conducted over the course of a year, it became apparent that the beginning teachers' struggles remained latent, hidden from public view, suppressed. It was only after the trust engendered between them and the research team had developed that their issues surfaced and found voice within the privileged space of confidential discussion. And so the beginning teachers, at first hesitantly, later purposefully, unburdened themselves to an outsider in a way that was not possible for them to do with their own colleagues.

On arrival in their new schools the beginning teachers brought with them the beliefs they held about education and were confronted, for the first time, by the pre-existing conditions in the workplace. Flores (2001) argues that, *"workplace conditions have a powerful effect on the understanding and practice of the profession*" (p. 144), while Billett (2001) shows how the conditions can either inhibit or facilitate the individual's participation in work.

Table 7.1 summarises the workplace conditions faced by the four beginning teachers in terms of inhibiting and facilitating dichotomies emanating from the people and institutions that held sway over them – the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC), the principal, their newly acquired colleagues, the students, the class they taught, their family – all of which had the potential to impact, positively or negatively, upon their professional practice. All of these conditions were observed, to different degrees, across the four schools either helping or hindering the work of the new teacher. As they struggled over the first few days and weeks to adjust to their newly acquired role and status, the surrounding conditions impinged on their personal beliefs and the beginning teachers started to experience the tensions and uncertainties that they would each have to deal with throughout their initial year of teaching.

Table 7.1: Workplace conditions that inhibited or facilitated the professional practices of the four beginning teachers (BTs)

	Inhibiting Conditions ⟷	Facilitating Conditions
Village Education Developement Committee (VEDC)		
1	VEDC does not not recognise the BT	VEDC recognises the BT as a valuable worker
2	VEDC makes no effort to organise financial support for the BT	VEDC organises a monthly living allowance for the BT
Principal		
3	Principal assigns most difficult class to BT	Principal assigns the easiest class to BT
4	Principal gives no direct advice to orientate the BT	Principal gives direct advice to orientate the BT or arranges for a senior teacher to do so
5	Principal makes no effort to welcome BT onto staff	Principal makes efforts to welcome BT onto staff
6	Principal addresses only administrative issues in staff meetings	Principal addresses administrative, teaching and learning issues in staff meetings
7	Principal expects BT to mind colleagues' classes	Principal organises staff so BT can concentrate on own class
8	Principal tells BT to use test results for reporting	Principal tells BT to use test results for reporting and also to inform teaching
Colleagues		
9	Colleagues work in isolation with little or no interest in supporting BT	Colleagues voluntarily assist BT to learn the 'ways of the school'
10	Colleagues focused on completing the textbook	Colleagues use observation of student progress as the basis for teaching
11	Colleagues offer no encouragement to BT	Colleagues encourage BT to teach extra curricula activities, for example, dancing
12	Colleagues ignore newly acquired knowledge and recent training of BT	Colleagues show interest in newly acquired knowledge and recent training of BT
13	Colleagues frequently absent	Colleagues rarely absent
Students		
14	Students have low attendance rates	Students have high attendance rates
15	Students rarely working at grade level	Students usually working at grade level
16	Students with many behavioural problems	Students with few behavioural problems
Class		
17	Class of excessive size	Class of manageable size
18	Class resources, particularly textbooks, are insufficient	Class resources, particularly textbooks, are sufficient
Own Family		
19	Family unable to provide financial support to the BT	Family able to provide financial support to the BT
20	Family needs BT to support family with other work	Family does not need BT to support family with other work

Some of the issues that arose in this way were relatively minor – issues such as whether to go straight into class when the bell rang or whether to linger with other staff gossiping on the verandah. These were frustrating at first, but caused no great concern for any of the beginning teachers. But there were other situations that they started to talk about privately that were causing each of them considerable stress. They were 'dilemmas' rather than 'problems' or 'challenges' because in each case they resulted from a tension between conflicting positions and required a choice between irreconcilable alternatives for resolution. In Cuban's (1992) terms dilemmas are "*conflict-filled situations that require choices, because competing highly prized values cannot be fully satisfied*" (p. 6). They are *"far messier, less structured, and often intractable to routine solutions"* (*ibid*., p. 6) and more problematic than challenges as *"they are less susceptible to technical solutions"* (*ibid*., p. 6). Cuban explains that the resolution of these dilemmas *"involves choices, often moral ones"* (*ibid*., p. 7). This definition accords well with the situations observed in this study.

Dilemmas involve conflict. This uncomfortable reality is often avoided by those who cling to romanticised notions of the 'community of practice' as a fellowship of collegiality and collaboration (Cumming, 2008). However, the findings in this study tell a different story. The dilemmas that beset the beginning teachers were experienced by them as significant problems, the stress which the dilemmas gave rise to affected the equanimity of their daily lives, and the compromises they were forced to make in order to achieve resolutions were undertaken only with disquiet. For these young Lao people any hint of conflict with a more senior person was cultural anathema. Instead conflicts, whether with others, with a set of values, or with an ethical position were internalised and rarely, if ever, confronted openly.

While the source of the dilemmas stemmed from the tensions between the established workplace conditions and the prior beliefs of each beginning teacher, they unfolded in two distinct arenas - those which involved other colleagues occurred outside the classroom; and those which involved the students occurred inside the classroom. The five dilemmas which each of the beginning teachers experienced and which they discussed during the interviews were:

- Whether to concentrate on teaching or on the requests from colleagues.
- Whether to report accurately or whether to embellish student results.
- Whether to seek professional help from colleagues or whether to remain silent.
- Whether to adopt a modern pedagogy or whether to forget such approaches.
- Whether to try and help students learn or whether to teach the textbook.

Each of these dilemmas is now discussed further.

7.3.1 Dilemma 1: Whether to concentrate on teaching or on the requests from colleagues.

On day one the new teachers arrived, were shown to their classrooms, given the textbooks, and in two of the four schools were immediately 'requested' to mind their colleagues' classes. In a third school, three weeks into the term, the beginning teacher found himself 'minding' four other classes for three weeks while the other three teachers were mostly absent; and throughout the year the same teacher was frequently called on to cover for others (See Case Record 1). Then in the fourth school, in the middle of the year, the beginning teacher was 'asked' to take on a second class for the whole of the second semester even though there were other more experienced teachers in the school who would have been better equipped to cope with this additional responsibility.

The dilemma for the beginning teachers was how to respond to the requests to take on additional work while trying to teach their own class. In some cases they were asked by colleagues to help out, but in others the 'request' came from the principal and as such was much closer to being a directive. They found themselves trapped between getting on with colleagues, some of whom were relatives, and doing justice to their own students. Minding other classes meant setting work on the board for the students to copy and then returning intermittently to settle the class, to check the work, and to put the next lot of copying up on the board. And of course each time the teacher left his or her own class the continuity of their own lesson was destroyed.

From observation this pattern of disjointed teaching was a common occurrence in all the schools. Older teachers, who were able to fall back on their established authority, seemed to juggle the responsibility of minding other classes with greater ease than their younger colleagues. Unlike the newcomers, they appeared to be well accustomed to such requests and unperturbed by the responsibility. The beginning teachers, on the other hand, were still getting to know their own students while being asked to cope with the dynamics of other classes. Not only did they find the task very demanding but privately they voiced their concerns that such arrangements were professionally inappropriate.

In all cases when the beginning teachers were asked to take on another class for a few days, or directed by the principal to teach an additional class for an extended period, the reason for the absence of the other teacher was clear and understandable. However, this only served to tighten the pressure on the beginning teacher to accede to the request or directive. With teachers receiving a salary of a little over $US1.50 per day and with rural teachers

typically experiencing delays of many months in the receipt of their salary most teachers had to find other sources of income.[219] This situation is also reported by Benveniste *et al*., (2008):

> *Given low teacher salary levels, delays in payment and the fact that most teachers report that wages are not sufficient to cover living expenses, it is not surprising that many teachers take on additional jobs to supplement their incomes. Most teachers with multiple jobs report they have to work two or more jobs to make ends meet.*
>
> *(ibid.,* p. 70)

As most of the teachers in the four schools supplemented their incomes with farming, their first priority at critical times in the year was to ensure that their crops were planted and later, harvested. In all cases the teachers' absences, which the beginning teachers had to cover for, were due to farming demands, sickness or the birth of a child. While the professional dilemma experienced by the new teachers was real, there was also an understanding that their colleagues were absent for genuine reasons.

7.3.2 Dilemma 2: Whether to report accurately or whether to embellish student results.

All of the teachers, including the beginning teachers, were required to carry out a number of individual administrative tasks including planning, reporting, and testing.[220] With an eye always out for the DEB, the principals made sure that the staff completed their administrative tasks on time and either took on the responsibility themselves or assigned a colleague to instruct the beginning teacher how to plan, report and complete the forms. Through a shared repertoire of tools - teachers' guides, textbooks and report forms, the beginning teachers all soon learned what was required.

After they had been teaching for a few months the beginning teachers were asked to list what they had found to be their greatest professional challenges since they commenced work. One surprising answer, expressed in different ways, but coming from all four teachers was *"learning from colleagues how to take 'shortcuts' in collating and reporting data"*. Over the course of the year the beginning teachers all admitted learning from other staff members how to 'boost' the monthly student test scores and pass rates in order to show their own teaching in a more favourable light. Through such 'guided participation' the younger teachers appropriated the practices of the more experienced teachers and gradually shifted their own practice as they began to report the adjusted results which were implicitly expected of them.

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[219] In 2009 the starting salary for Primary School Teachers who had completed the 11+1 diploma was 405,000 kip or (US$50.62) per month (MoE, 2008a).

[220] See Section 6.1.

However, none of this occurred without some expressed feelings that this growing practice was not quite right.

An additional tension stemmed from the practice of writing up lesson plans after the lesson had been taught. Unlike the work on practicum when plans had to be submitted before the lesson was taught, plans were now completed after the lesson for the purposes of reporting to the DEB. Over the first few weeks of the year the beginning teachers expressed surprise that no one required their plans before the lesson. Equally puzzling was the fact that there appeared to be no mechanism in place for giving them feedback on their teaching. Later they realized that the purpose of posting schedules and preparing written lesson plans was simply "*in case the inspectors come*". In other words these practices became transformed, and were undertaken not for their original purpose of supporting the teaching process, but rather as a device for keeping the bureaucracy at bay.

While the beginning teachers knew they needed to complete these administrative tasks in both a timely and an appropriate manner so as to get on with the principal and thereby attain the positive reports they needed in order to gain permanency, privately they spoke of their disquiet at embellishing the figures. The issue was emphasised during the final interviews of the year when the four beginning teachers were asked to compare how many students they reported passing the reading tests with the reality of how many could actually complete the work – a comparison that highlighted a significant disparity between the two figures (see Section 6.4.2).

Schweisfurth's (2011) work, discussed earlier (Section 2.2.7), asserts that false reporting is a common problem in countries which have 'high power distance' and where teachers *'are expected to obey authorities'* (p. 428). The findings of this study confirm that, like their colleagues, the beginning teachers appropriated such practices and adjusted student results in order to protect themselves from criticism from higher authorities. In turn, the collective reporting of the staff enabled the principal to provide favourable reports to the district authorities and thus reduced the likelihood of any criticism being directed at the school. One of the beginning teachers who had earlier in the year expressed considerable doubt about the ethics of what she saw around her and of what she was being encouraged to do was to later rationalise the practice away as being in the interests of the whole school. In terms of her acceptance by the 'community of practice' this was the response which would cause her the least difficulty.

This dilemma of reporting accurately has ramifications for accountability and transparency across the education sector in the Lao PDR. Adams *et al.,* (2001) in an analysis of the links between research, policy, strategic planning and education development in Laos, points to a restrictive 'one-way' flow of information in which data of dubious quality leaves the schools and is sent up through the district and provincial bureaucracies to the central Ministry of Education (MoE) to make its contribution towards the national targets for the all important Second Millennium Development Goal.[221] A two-way flow of reliable data up and analysis down between schools and the higher authorities as recommended by Adams *et al*., (1997) as a precursor towards genuine reform, appears to be non-existent. Similarly there is little evidence of analysis travelling back to the school to stimulate reflection by principals and staff on its implications for authentic student learning, as advocated elsewhere by Schubert and Prouty-Harris (2003) and Motala (2001).

7.3.3 Dilemma 3: Whether to seek professional help from colleagues or whether to remain silent

While the beginning teachers generally felt socially supported and welcomed into the schools, their interviews were interspersed with comments about feeling *"professionally isolated"*. Just as the beginning teachers had reported encountering on practicum, a lack of guidance about pedagogical practices from their cooperating teachers, they also reported a lack of willingness on the part of their new colleagues to talk about teaching. Apart from explaining individual textbook lessons, there was little evidence that older teachers ever took time to talk about teaching practices with beginning teachers. It was this lack of discussion about teaching and classroom issues which created the climate of professional isolation for those starting out. Each of the beginning teachers had similar experiences - there were limited resources in the school and few teachers willing (or able) to help the young teachers in the areas in which they recognized they needed help, especially the area of supporting student learning. Other areas which the beginning teachers reported as challenging were having to deal with the wide range of ability levels in the class, but again they found that none of their colleagues were prepared to discuss such matters.

Soon after arriving at their schools several of the beginning teachers reported that they gained the impression from other staff that having just graduated they "*should know how to teach*". Studies by Lacey (1977), Veenman (1984) and Kelchtermans (1993) have

[221] Millennium Development Goal 2: "*Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality*." See also Section 2.1.1.

documented the vulnerability of the beginning teacher, highly sensitive to the perceptions and judgments of others, while Connelly and Clandinin (1995) raise the issue of who teachers can confide in about their classroom experiences: *"if they tell stories about the secret events of the classroom ... they are portrayed as uncertain, tentative, non-expert characters"* (p. 15).

The dilemma of wanting to appear competent and gain acceptance from colleagues and yet needing to ask questions and talk about their teaching was something that each of the participants in the study experienced. After discovering the common attitude of their colleagues towards professional discussions, the beginning teachers said they consciously refrained from directing any pedagogical questions to them, and this stance subsequently increased their feelings of professional isolation. As they soon found, their own desire to pursue topics concerning teaching practices which their colleagues avoided, was overridden by their greater need for social support and acceptance. When asked during the final visits to discuss this matter further, none of the beginning teachers blamed their colleagues for not talking. In retrospect they believed that their colleagues simply did not have the answers to their problems. After initially believing that their colleagues would have the answers, the realisation that this was not the case came, according to comments made during the interviews, as a surprise.

The exposition of this dilemma raises two issues: first, the availability of advice, written or oral; and, second, the attitudes held towards requesting advice. With respect to the first issue, none of the beginning teachers had been able to retain the textbooks which they had used during their course, as these were owned by the TTC. And apart from the subject teachers' guides, and in one school a solitary resource book left over from an in-service training program, there were no professional resource books of any kind in any of the four schools. Consequently, the only possible source of advice had to come from talking with others. The second issue relates to the general attitude towards talking with others. The evidence from this study suggests that teachers believed that answers to teaching problems lay with 'experts' rather than in collegial inquiry and discussion. Little's (1981) advice, which stemmed from her review of schools in the USA, recommended that resolving problems about teaching could best occur when teachers were encouraged to engage in 'precise' talk about their teaching. Rosenholtz (1989) in her study categorised schools as 'learning enriched' and 'learning impoverished' depending on whether there were opportunities for staff to engage in collegial discussions and to learn about teaching. Shifting the culture of the school so that teachers believe that inquiry and talk about teaching can help resolve problems, appears to be

a first step towards helping beginning teachers cope with the next dilemma of how to help students learn.

7.3.4 Dilemma 4: Whether to adopt a modern pedagogy or whether to forget such approaches.

The dilemma of whether or not to incorporate learner-centred methods into textbook lessons was experienced by each of the beginning teachers. The observational data reported in Chapter 6 shows that the most common teaching practices were traditional methods of teacher-led explanations, student copying and individual question and answer sessions.[222] From the limited number of times beginning teachers were observed using learner-centred methods it was apparent they all found it difficult to reconcile a textbook-based curriculum with the recommended pedagogical practices of the MoE.[223] This finding is not unique to this study and corroborates research conducted by Molteno *et al*., (2000), Barrett (2007) and Sriprakash (2010), that highlights the clash between a 'textbook-based curriculum' and a 'learner-centred' pedagogy.

The textbook content in Lao primary schools is not only 'crowded' but also makes little allowance for the adoption of strategies which require time, resources and skillful classroom management. After an initial period of experimentation with learner-centred methods, each beginning teacher was observed adopting a traditional approach to teaching, one that aligned itself closely to the textbook questions and tasks. At times the teachers adopted what Mtika and Gates (2010) identify as the *"surface features"* (p. 400) of learner-centred methods. For example group work was occasionally undertaken but usually with tasks which could be completed individually, and topics were given for discussion but there was little chance to discuss much more than the answers which were expected and could be found in the textbook.

The literature review (Chapter 2) indicates a range of reasons for not implementing learner-centred methods. In this study, seven reasons were given by the beginning teachers for the limited number of attempts they made to incorporate such strategies into their daily teaching routines and a brief discussion of each reason follows.

First, each of the teachers reported feeling comfortable using the traditional approaches as these were the techniques that had been used when they were at school. This accords with other studies showing how biographical experience can influence the way teachers perceive teaching (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992; Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). Second, the

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222 Characteristics of traditional teaching are described in Sections 2.1.4 and Section 6.2.

223 The recommended pedagogical practices are listed in the *National Education Quality Guidelines* (MoE, 2010a) and in the *National Charter of Teacher Competencies* (MoE, 2007a).

beginning teachers recalled having only limited exposure to learner-centred strategies while on practicum and no demonstrations of the strategies at other times during their studies at the TTC. This finding parallels other research that highlights the limited exposure of learner-centred approaches in training programs for teachers in many developing contexts (O'Sullivan, 2004; Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Mtika & Gates, 2010). Third, there was no encouragement by colleagues to persevere with using learner-centred strategies. One of the beginning teachers reported that an older teacher had told her "*not to bother as it made the lessons longer.*"

Fourth, they did not observe any of the other teachers in their school using such methods apart from the occasional use of a teaching aid and the routine of sitting students in groups. Fifth, each of the beginning teachers reported that through trial and error they soon realized that by asking questions which were not in the textbooks, and attempting to incorporate group work, the lessons took up a far greater amount of time than was available. Sixth, when they did attempt strategies such as group work or incorporating games or activities, they did not see their students learning any more than when they taught the whole class using more didactic teaching methods. The seventh and final reason for not persevering with a learner-centred approach was that on the few occasions when they did attempt genuine group work or new activities (such as a quiz or a role play), or when they deviated from the textbook lessons, they found it more difficult to manage the behaviour of the students. In a sense the students were integral players in the community of practice and behaved in ways that reinforced the use of traditional teaching practices by their teachers. A response that was commonly observed in such circumstances was for the teacher to resort to dictation or copying to regain control.

As the year progressed and pressure to complete the textbooks increased, the beginning teachers each adopted practices which took up the least amount of time, so as to ensure that all of the textbook lessons could be completed. Unlike the findings in other studies (Schubert & Prouty-Harris, 2003; Postlethwaite 1998), these teachers did not raise the facts that their classrooms were crowded and that they lacked materials as reasons for not adopting learner-centred strategies. Perhaps these reasons were taken to be too obvious and did not need articulating or perhaps they saw these conditions as inevitable and unchangeable.

The descriptions of the schools and classrooms provided in Appendix 1 show situations in which the conditions for using learner-centred methods were far from ideal -teachers with large classes; classrooms without internal walls; only the most basic of resources such as a

blackboard, some chalk and some textbooks; and virtually no 'special' teaching materials except a UNICEF 'Blue Box' in three of the schools. As mentioned earlier (Section 2.1.5), Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) argue that adopting learner-centred approaches in such environments would be extremely difficult for even the most highly experienced and motivated of teachers.

The classroom observations revealed that there were limited opportunities for students to ask their teachers questions, or for them to answer questions which required anything more than finding answers in the textbooks. This finding is consistent with those reported in studies in Laos on teaching in primary schools (TEADC, 2004a) and on teaching in the TTCs (Chounlamany & Kounphilaphanh, 2011). A common theme in many studies (Alexander, 2000; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Hardman, 2008) is the critical importance of tailoring dialogue and communication to the individual needs of the students in order to help them learn. In contrast, the findings of this study appear to show that the beginning teachers, rather than working towards increasing communications with the students through the lessons, attempted to limit communications with students knowing that to do so would take up valuable time - time needed to teach the textbook.

The discussion around this dilemma reveals the need for all teachers to become more aware of how different strategies can support different kinds of learning. As Alexander (2000) argues, there is little value in "*demonizing*" (p. 527) one approach over the other. While proponents such as Guthrie (1990, 2011) argue for the suitability of using traditional approaches for teaching in developing countries, others such as O'Sullivan (2004) advocate the use of a *"learning-centred"* approach (p. 599), as opposed to a *"learner-centred"* approach (my emphasis). The former approach allows teachers to judiciously select methods which sit comfortably within the limitations of their local realities, but which still pursue the objective of developing higher-order thinking skills. Ultimately, what is important is that teachers understand how well different strategies support different purposes for student learning, be it the memorisation of facts or the creative use of problem-solving skills. The findings provide evidence that a 'formalistic' approach to teaching is part of the tradition of teaching in Laos where knowledge is primarily 'transmitted'. In those uncommon instances when knowledge is 'constructed' it is always constrained by the over-ridings concerns to get on with the 'proper' teaching of textbook content. However, what is also clear from the observational data is that even these formalistic strategies are poorly implemented. The learning outcomes of students show evidence that even with beginning teachers adopting a

predominantly 'formalistic' approach to teaching, students are failing to learn at their grade levels. By the end of the year, with questions about pedagogical practices and how best to help children learn left unanswered, each of the teachers expressed frustration at their own inadequacies.

7.3.5 Dilemma 5: Whether to try and help students learn or whether to teach the textbook.

The classes to which the beginning teachers were assigned were typical of the classes across the four schools in that most of the students were working below their grade levels. For the beginning teacher who was assigned a Grade 1 class of 69 students, the problem was compounded when he discovered that half of his students were just starting school and the other half were repeating the grade. The dilemma that each beginning teacher faced quite early on in the year was how to help all children learn while at the same time listening to the directive from the principal that all textbook lessons had to be completed within the year. As a result the beginning teachers were caught between trying to teach their students what they needed at an appropriate level, and delivering the textbook lessons regardless of the understanding or progress of the students. So long as the textbook lessons kept 'ticking over' at the necessary pace, that was all that was required of the teachers, and perhaps all that mattered.

Textbooks need not be a burden to teachers, and when correctly designed and used intelligently in the teaching process, they are invaluable for helping students learn (Osborne, Jones & Stein, 1985). In some quarters they are considered the *"most important learning resource for students"* (ADB, 2006, p. 127). However, the findings in this study illustrate how a textbook-based curriculum can work against student learning and create problems for the teachers that the textbooks were initially designed to overcome. In these classrooms the textbooks were the curriculum. The rigid and crowded nature of the textbook materials sat uneasily with trying to teach classes in which most students were performing below the grade level of their textbook. While the advice given to the beginning teachers by colleagues about how to help children learn specific concepts and skills was very limited, they were more forthcoming with advice on how to keep up with the planned schedule for the textbook lessons (see Section 5.3). This 'guided participation' helped the beginning teachers learn lessons themselves - how not to waste time on group work, how not to do activities which took too long, and how to make students copy down work. This guidance appeared to be not so much about helping with authentic learning, but rather how to make the class manageable so that the textbook lessons could be completed. Such advice was reported by the new

teachers as being highly valuable particularly as the year progressed and they each began to see the difficulties they were going to have to complete the textbooks in the rapidly diminishing time left for the task.

The beginning teachers thus reported in the interviews that they welcomed practical advice when it was offered by older experienced teachers. However, this advice was largely of a 'reproductive' nature and served only to induct the newcomers into the existing and 'known' ways of working. In the words of Little (1990) the older teachers worked to *"conserve the present"* (p. 509). There was no evidence that the advice or guidance from these older teachers encouraged the beginning teachers to experiment with new ways, or encouraged them to try out their own ideas - situations which might, in some measure, have contributed to transforming the ways of teaching in the schools.

The problem of having to 'teach the textbook' has been recognized in other studies, most recently by Mustafa and Cullingford (2008) in their study of primary classrooms in Jordan. They too found that the possibilities for teachers to experiment with teaching approaches other than a 'chalk and talk' approach were severely constrained by the overcrowded nature of the textbooks and the reluctance of teachers to deviate from accepted practice. They also report that there was little possibility of slowing down the rate of progress through the textbooks due to the pressure on the teachers and the schools to complete the lessons in the time set by the centralized education system.

In these Lao classrooms the textbooks were seen as the main source of knowledge, and so the focus on transmitting this knowledge dissuaded the teachers from drawing upon other events or activities happening within the community, except at a cursory level. The many festivals and community events in the villages could well have been used to stimulate children's thinking had there been time to integrate them into textbook lessons. In fact, the ability to design local curricula is one of the 30 teaching competencies that all teachers are supposed to have, but one that the teachers in the schools reported having never heard about. As the year progressed the beginning teachers battled on teaching the content in the textbooks as best they could, always mindful that they had to be able to report that they had taught all lessons in the textbook and so covered all the material that would be included in the final tests at the end of the year.

7.3.6 Summary

To a greater or lesser degree each of the beginning teachers experienced the dilemmas described above. Caught between their limited understanding of the skills required to genuinely implement the learner-centred strategies advocated in their pre-service course, their own past histories of schooling, and the encompassing workplace practices in their schools, they grappled with what they 'should' and what they 'could' achieve. Other studies cited above indicate that such dilemmas are not unique to teachers in Laos. For the purpose of this discussion the five dilemmas have been isolated from each other but in the context of the teachers' lives they were experienced as an entangled complex of tensions and concerns. Both individually and as a whole they constituted a major challenge for the beginning teachers to resolve. A discussion of the kinds of strategies which the teachers chose in their attempts to resolve these dilemmas moves the discussion to the next section of the chapter.

7.4 Resolving Dilemmas through Social Strategies

In their first hectic weeks in the classroom the beginning teachers had much to contend with. For a start they were discovering that they had to both teach and learn how to be teachers. At the same time their evolving educational beliefs were now under challenge by the practices they saw around them in the workplace. Their concerns, at first somewhat nebulous, soon coalesced into five dilemmas which could not be avoided. Decisions had to be taken and all four of the beginning teachers were soon struggling with whether to agree to requests from colleagues to mind their classes, whether to go down the path of embellishing test results, whether or not to raise uncomfortable topics about student progress and learning with their colleagues, whether to bother with modern approaches to teaching that perhaps did not work at all anyway, and above all else, whether to do what everyone else was doing and just concentrate on getting through the textbook.

It soon became clear to them that in order to resolve the dilemmas with which they were faced they would either have to accede to the pressures to conform or they would have to resist and look for alternative courses of action. In making these choices the beginning teachers were adopting what Lacey (1977) has described as "*social strategies*" (p. 89). Their choices were limited - they could comply with the expected practices in the school, or they could take alternative actions of their own devising, or they could seek a compromise between these two positions. Ultimately it was the first and the last of these social strategies which the beginning teachers were observed adopting, described here as a 'strategy of compliance' and

a ‘strategy of compromise’ respectively. But in both cases there were implications for their own fledgling careers and their advancement, not to mention the implications for authentic learning by their students. These two strategies are discussed below.

Without job security or a regular salary, the long-term goal of the beginning teachers was to achieve permanency and it was this, above all else, that influenced their choice of strategy. In making their decisions, they were very much alone because, as discussed, the dilemmas were rarely, if ever, confronted openly, and with colleagues generally unwilling to discuss educational matters beyond the administrative or the mundane, there were limited opportunities to confide in fellow teachers. In fact, in many ways their colleagues were part of the problem. So the four young teachers adopted strategies that balanced their personal beliefs against what they knew were the expected social and cultural practices. However, while the long-term goal was to achieve permanency, the two kinds of strategies – ‘compliance’ and ‘compromise’, held different objectives. ‘Compliance’, whether taken up willingly or with an on-going degree of disquiet (a ‘reluctant compliance’) sought as its main objective to resolve the dilemmas in such a way that social harmony would be maintained. The alternative strategy of ‘compromise’ also avoided any outward sign of conflict with other colleagues, but ultimately grew out of the beginning teachers’ beliefs that they were and that they would continue to be, professionally responsible for student learning. However, regardless of the strategy they adopted they all had the same long-term goal – to gain permanency.

7.4.1 The strategy of ‘compliance’

After the four beginning teachers had finished their training, three of them returned to teach in their home village and the fourth to teach in a neighbouring village, all as ‘volunteer’ teachers. In doing so they were re-entering a network of relationships which had existed for them since their childhood. After their time away studying they were also re-immersing themselves again in the norms and values of their own culture. And three of the four were now working alongside at least one teacher who had taught them when they had attended primary school themselves.

In the Lao villages[224] where they lived, *Theravada* Buddhism was at the centre.[225] In such communities Buddhist values and Buddhist beliefs play a dominant role in the way people lead their lives. Society is hierarchical with social status playing an important

[224] The Lao National Statistics Centre gives a figure of 8,704 villages in Laos in 2009. In perhaps 60 percent of these villages so called *Lao Loum* (Lowland Lao, or ethnic Lao) form the large majority of the inhabitants (Evans, 2004).
[225] Evans (1998) shows that much of the Buddhist tradition in Laos is infused with Animistic beliefs and practices.

organising role. Primary values of interest to this study are respect for elders such as parents and older relatives and deference to authority figures such as Village Committee members, teachers and government officials. These values also extend to include the veneration of monks.[226] Vistarini (1994) characterises 'Lao culture' as one which *"stresses harmonious relationships, respect for age and wisdom and tolerance for other people"* (p. 294), a depiction which is supported in Kittiphanh's (2011) work, while Stuart-Fox and Mixay (2010) comment, *"Buddhism permeates Lao culture through and through. It accounts not just for the rituals that Lao perform throughout the year, but also for their acceptance of life and tolerance of others"* (p. 12). In general terms, people are non-confrontational and deference is expected and paid to those in authority. In the context of the school, students are wary of the authority of their teachers, and the teachers observe and maintain the social distinctions that uphold the school principal in a position of respect. In the classrooms the message of the textbooks is one of *"obedience to superiors, patriotism, cleanliness"* (Evans, 1998, p. 166), and in this the school serves to reproduce an idealised vision of the society and its people. The beginning teachers, having grown up under this conservative ideology, now became the purveyors and transmitters of its 'truths'.

Upon arrival in their schools, each of the beginning teachers was located at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder of the education system, in the position of 'volunteer' teacher. Like the older teachers before them, several of whom spoke of their own struggle to become a teacher, the four beginning teachers would also have to 'wait their time' until they became permanent. The reward to both them and their families for this waiting would be a regular, albeit small, monthly salary, some state assisted medical care and an official teaching position. However, until the beginning teachers had their applications processed and approved, they engaged with senior staff, particularly the principals, knowing that they were reliant on them for providing favourable reports to the DEB as well as mustering support from the Village Committee in order to meet their daily needs.[227]

The social strategy adopted by the beginning teachers of absorbing the surrounding practices and following the advice of their colleagues has been defined here as 'compliance' and in the deferential and hierarchical society in which they lived this was the 'natural' path

[226] Evans (2004, p. 14) gives figures of 4,937 Buddhists *vats* (temples) and 19,634 monks across the country in 2002. As an interesting comparison, there were 8,573 primary schools and 27,586 primary school teachers in Laos in 2004-2005 (MoE, 2005c).

[227] As discussed in Section 5.2.2 only one of the four teachers ended up receiving a regular monthly allowance from the Village Committee and even then it was not due to the principal's efforts at advocacy but rather because of the traditions of the Village Committee.

to take. The dilemmas and the tensions they at first experienced were real enough, but their resolution was achieved simply by putting aside one half of the equation and accepting and adopting the encompassing practices.

At times, however, although the beginning teachers went along with what was expected of them, they did so only after a degree of soul-searching and of privately voicing reservations about the proprietary of the practices. Although there was 'compliance' there was also a measure of reluctance, which in some instances lasted throughout the year. Not all the dilemmas were so easily resolved by simple acceptance of the situation; however, over time, the positions taken in varying degrees by the beginning teachers changed and moved and what had earlier been a cause for consternation, now became a way out of a dilemma.

For three of the situations which confronted them – how to respond to requests from colleagues for assistance, how to report student results, and how to discuss professional matters with colleagues - each of the beginning teachers privately questioned both the implicit and explicit guidance proffered by their older colleagues. As they tried to find a way to resolve the hidden conflicts they were experiencing, their private 'self-questioning' transformed the situations for them into dilemmas. However, it was also quite clear to them how important it was to develop and maintain good relationships with each member of the school staff and in particular with the principal.

On the whole the beginning teachers outwardly responded positively to the requests from others to mind their classes even though they complained privately that they believed it interfered with the teaching of their own students. They also complied with their colleagues' suggestions to submit reports that presented a favourable picture of the progress of their students. While initially two of the beginning teachers privately expressed disagreement with this practice, they all eventually complied. The lack of interest exhibited by their colleagues in discussing the problems which they encountered when trying to help students learn, was also, after a time, simply accepted. While this situation generated some private negative comments from three of the beginning teachers, they explained that they could do nothing about this and that from what they could see, they understood that their colleagues did not have any answers to their problems. Consequently, each of the beginning teachers maintained friendly relationships with their colleagues and just gossiped along with them about the village, family and other social matters when they had free time together.

The three dilemmas discussed above revolved around administrative issues or relationships between staff; however, the other two dilemmas were directly concerned with approaches to teaching and learning in the classroom. The first of these concerned the use of the 'modern' pedagogical approaches that had been advocated in the TTC. At first all the beginning teachers attempted to use 'learner-centred' approaches to some extent, but soon saw that other teachers were not doing so and in some cases were openly discouraging such approaches. Within a short space of time the beginning teachers were privately questioning the value of their own 'modern' approaches and bit-by-bit abandoned them in favour of a more 'traditional' style of teaching. Their initial attempts at innovative practice were set aside and the dilemma they expressed earlier on about their approach to teaching was resolved by complying with the staff and modeling their teaching style mainly on that of their colleagues.

7.4.2 The strategy of 'compromise'

The findings in this study show that although each of the four beginning teachers gravitated towards the practices of their colleagues, they still held to the belief that the role of the teacher was not just to guide the students through every lesson in the textbook, but also 'to help children learn'. As they tried to follow the directive that they had to cover every lesson in the textbooks in the year they also clung to their genuine desire to teach their students and respond to their needs. To do this they found a compromise position: they not only worked at 'teaching the textbook' but they also independently developed a number of 'learning support initiatives'. These initiatives arose from their personal experiences of schooling, their nascent philosophy of education formed during their time at the TTC, and their direct observation of and engagement with their students. Generally they were developed independently of other teachers, without advice from others and without seeing such practices being used in other classrooms. The most common of these 'learning support initiatives', described earlier in Section 6.4, were:

- setting and marking homework;
- using break times to allow students to catch up;
- using some non-core subject time to teach literacy;
- setting different kinds of tasks for students of different abilities;
- organising students to check each other's work;
- talking to students about the reasons for learning;
- talking to parents about their children and enlisting their support; and,
- staying in the classroom throughout the entire lesson time.

Not all of the beginning teachers took the same initiatives or used them to the same extent. One of the teachers was observed trying out new approaches with students significantly more than the other three; however, all of the teachers engaged in at least three of these initiatives at various times throughout the year. The 'learning support initiatives' were used mainly during times when conditions in the classroom were stable and supportive. For example, when teachers did not have to mind their colleagues' classes, or in one case, when the arrival of a new principal inspired the teacher to attempt something different. One of the beginning teachers who was initially observed implementing several 'learning support initiatives' in the first part of the year, became overwhelmed by the size of her class of 70 students and gradually left off the initiatives and slipped into following the practice of her colleagues of simply getting through the textbook without trying out anything new or different to promote learning. Similarly, the teacher who mid-way through the year was asked to take over teaching a second class as well as his own, stopped using the initiatives he had used during the first half of the year and simply concentrated on surviving. Only one of the beginning teachers, and without any external encouragement, remained determined to continue trying to implement and then sustain the support initiatives he had instigated with his students. His determination stemmed from his own observations of how his students were responding to his teaching and were learning.

While the number of 'learning support initiatives' observed in the schools was relatively small compared to the number of examples of 'compliance', reluctant or otherwise, they are nevertheless significant as they represent attempts by the beginning teachers to focus on the authentic learning of their students. With no authority within the school to make anything but the smallest of changes within their own classrooms, the beginning teachers were seen, to borrow Lave and Wenger's (1991) term, to initiate actions within the "*interstitial space*" (p. 41) that existed in the classroom between teacher and student - in other words in those small spaces between the expected ways of doing things in which individuals can make decisions and take initiatives. Given the constraints and opportunities which surrounded them, these actions, although limited, can be interpreted as attempts by beginning teachers to transform their own practice.

7.4.3 Summary

The four beginning teachers were each intent on maintaining good relationships with their colleagues and with the principal of their school. In this sense their common strategy of 'compliance' is similar to reports in studies by Schempp *et al*., (1993) and Flores (2001) who documented the collapse of 'resilience' in first year teachers as they adopted strategies to 'survive' at school. It also parallels the studies of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) who found that teachers altered their practices in order to please the 'hierarchy', and of Dimmock and Walker (1999) who described how in their study, an emphasis on preserving relationships and maintaining social harmony pervaded the culture of the schools.

While the four young teachers were intent on avoiding confrontation, and complied with the advice and practices of their colleagues in order to do so, at times they did this reluctantly. This was seen in the way they all sought to find alternative strategies to help their students learn. These were compromise positions that tried to find social space between deferring to others and trying to respond creatively to the needs of their students. However, their ultimate goal was the award of 'permanency' and to achieve this it was obvious that they could not appear to be opposing the authority of their colleagues and especially the authority of the principal. As they were often reminded, maintaining solidarity was all important.

Earlier, during their training, they had reported while on practicum how it was important to comply with requests from colleagues not only to maintain social harmony but also to achieve favourable reports. Now in their first year of teaching they again turned to the strategy of 'compliance' to improve their chances of obtaining support for their applications to move from 'contract teacher' or 'volunteer teacher' to 'permanent teacher'. These strategies, aimed at influencing those in authority, support the contention made by Stuart-Fox, (2008) that promotion in the government and the bureaucracy is greatly facilitated with the help of an influential patron. The next section turns to an analysis of the working of the 'community of practice'.

7.5 The Nature of the Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of *"legitimate peripheral participation",* explains that in the process of learning it is not only individuals who are transformed, but that individuals can work to influence the established practices of the community of practice. In their words *"participation does not take place in a static context"* (p. 116). A similar perspective is found in the work of Rogoff (2003) who argues that through the participation of

individuals in socio-cultural activities, communities can also change. Examples of the transformative potential of a 'community of practice' are provided by Lee and Roth (2003), and by Cumming (2008) who describes how both the *"newcomers"* as well as those with whom they interact *"... undergo degrees of change and/or transformation that impact on their communities as well as themselves"* (p. 9).

In contrast to the work cited above, this study found that the beginning teachers had little choice to do anything other than contribute to the reproduction of the dominant practices if they were going to maintain social harmony and achieve their goal of permanency. The study provides a clear picture of how cultural norms and embedded power relationships within schools can conspire to limit the transformative potential of the community of practice. By way of contrast, the study conducted in the USA by Borko (2004) has shown that in some cultures when new entrants to the workplace are considered to be of equal status with other members and when their viewpoints are welcomed and considered, the transformative power of the community of practice is realised.

The only transformations which were observed in the four communities of practice in this study were of a personal, reflexive nature as the beginning teachers assessed their possible options for action. Rogoff, (1995) has emphasized how appropriation of practices occurs when it suits *"the purposes of the new owner"* (p. 152). In this study, the purpose was to maintain social harmony and achieve permanency. While many examples have been provided of appropriation of practices by the new teachers (Sections 6.2 and 6.3) none of the 'learning support initiatives' implemented by beginning teachers were seen to have any observable effect on the practices of the rest of the staff. As described in Section 5.5.1 on only three occasions did a beginning teacher report that a colleague had commented on a specific teaching technique which he or she had been using.

Furthermore, except in the case of one teacher, the initiatives which were introduced by the beginning teachers then decreased over the year due to the time constraints that resulted from having to 'teach the textbook', the focus on administrative duties in the schools, and with few exceptions, the lack of encouragement from the permanent teachers for any attempts by new teachers to try out different teaching strategies in the classroom. Apart from the initial attempts by one of the beginning teachers, there was also little evidence of new teachers being confident to give their opinions openly or to talk with their colleagues about the discord they recognised between the teaching approaches advocated in their recently completed pre-service course and the practices they now saw in place in the school. However,

at various times in the year each of the beginning teachers commented during the interviews that being new they should *"just listen to the others"*.

An analysis of the instructional and educational repertoire of 'tools' which existed across the four schools - a national curriculum, national planning and reporting forms, standard textbooks and teachers' guides, and a national examination – provides some further insights into why the beginning teachers, on the whole, gradually shifted towards emulating the practices of their colleagues. Fuller (1991) explains that these tools, *"often reinforce the social rules and form of classroom management enacted by the teacher"* (p. 68). For example, in the observed Lao classrooms, the teacher frequently organised the class to chant language texts and multiplication tables and to copy from the board or textbooks. Such activities served as a mechanism of social control for managing students' behaviour in the classroom. These tools, such as the administrative forms, also constrained and to a degree directed the way teachers interacted with their colleagues. The beginning teachers reported that principals and other teachers showed much greater concern for planning and reporting requirements than for village realities and student progress.

Hargreaves (1990), in his study into the politics of teachers' use of time and space, touches on similar issues when he discusses the mechanistic way in which teaching is often planned by those in power. He argues that attempts are often made to *"exert high control over timelines and schedules to ensure that the work of the organization is completed successfully"* (p. 309). This was evident in the way each DEB requested principals to instruct their teachers to teach to the same subject timetables and follow the standardized yearly plans, even though many factors such as the weather, agricultural imperatives, births, deaths, local festivals and ceremonies made it virtually impossible to implement these plans. The many events and activities which punctuated the school year are documented in Section 5.1. However, rather than acknowledge these events which disrupted the teaching program, everyone completed reports as though the teaching had proceeded as planned. When asked to explain why, one teacher simply said: *"If we don't complete the lessons when they [the DEB] come to inspect, they will blame us"*.

Reports from each of the beginning teachers, as well as direct observations, showed that there were no cultural expectations of professional learning in the schools. This lack of expectation contributed to 'reproductive' learning with members of their community of practice engaged in a disproportionately large amount of time talking about administrative matters. In only one of the schools was there any evidence of the principal providing

structured opportunities for teachers to collectively discuss pedagogical issues or to work together to solve problems regarding student learning. In this sense, the 'teacher-learning' environments could be described as 'restricted'[228] or in the words of Rosenholtz (1989), as *"learning impoverished"* (p. 82). In environments which offer no opportunities for professional discussions, learning to teach meant *"arrival at a fixed destination through the vehicle of experience*" (*ibid*., p. 82). Similarly, in this study, teacher learning involved being inducted into 'acceptable' practices. Attempting to solve problems or foster authentic student learning occurred only in isolation and without engaging in collaboration with colleagues.

Little's work (1990) directs attention to the complex nature of collegiality. She describes how collegiality can range from being opportunistic to a collegiality that requires joint work by both parties and which is designed with a specific structure within an institution. In this study both forms of collegiality were observed. In the staff rooms, on the verandahs, and in the playgrounds an 'opportunistic' collegiality existed - one wherein teachers 'chatted' to each other about domestic matters, swapped stories about students and talked over specific textbook lessons. There were also examples in the schools of collegiality which resulted from the effort of 'joint work'. In some aspects this 'planned' collegiality mirrored the 'shared enterprise' of physical labour which existed for the teachers beyond the school in their fields and plantations which, for reasons of economic necessity, was the common experience of most of them. Enterprises within the school could also require a degree of collaboration – building a school fence, maintaining school gardens and repairing school buildings. In similar fashion the mutual engagement which occurred when teachers worked together to prepare reports for 'superiors' was another example of 'planned' collegiality. Here, too, there was a parallel with village life when the people were called together to report on village statistics for the government. However, there was little evidence in any of the four schools of a 'planned collegiality' which revolved around analysing and solving problems related to specific pedagogical issues. Little (1990), has described these forms of collegiality which require *"thoughtful explicit examination of practices and their consequences"* (p. 522), as being critical for any kind of school improvement and ultimately for student success.

This study supports the findings of McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) who concluded that some teaching communities act conservatively to reinforce traditional ways of working. In a study which investigated similar issues Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman and Liu (2001)

[228] Fuller and Unwin (2006) use a continuum from 'restrictive' to 'expansive' to describe characteristics of workplaces.

identified three types of schools in the USA which they labelled 'veteran', 'novice' and 'integrated'. They concluded that schools which had a 'veteran culture' were likely to silence new teachers and work to mould them into adopting the established practices in the school. In the four schools in this study similar patterns were seen with beginning teachers in formal settings such as staff meetings, being mostly silent and not expected to give their opinions. However, a significant difference was that the beginning teachers considered most of the other staff members 'friendly' and that these staff offered the beginning teachers social and emotional support. This of course was not surprising as the teachers from each school were usually from the same village, generally knew each others' families and were sometimes directly related.

In virtually all instances there were social and cultural connections between the teachers - they and their families each gave alms at the Buddhist *vat*, participated in the same festivals and were called on to attend the same village meetings. While this familiarity served the needs of the beginning teachers for emotional support, it was also advantageous for the more experienced teachers who tapped into the beginning teachers' respect, energy and willingness to please.

As documented under the discussion concerning Dilemma 1 (Section 7.3.1) senior teachers were not hesitant to ask a beginning teacher to mind classes, or to complete other tasks such as running assemblies, organising sports sessions and teaching dancing. From a western perspective the older teachers could be accused of exploiting the vulnerability of the younger teachers. However, from a Lao perspective the younger teachers were being appropriately deferential and carrying out requests without complaint, while several of the older teachers, when queried about these practices during interviews, claimed they were merely inculcating the younger teachers into the full gamut of their professional responsibilities.

The beginning teachers' agreement to mind other teachers' classes and to fit in with the existing practices of the established members of the community of practice is not an unexpected phenomenon in a society in which the young show respect to those who are senior to them. However, there is also a political dimension to consider. In this 'one-party' state different opinions are aired in public only very cautiously, open debate is stifled,[229] and genuine dissent in the public arena is almost unheard of (Stuart-Fox, 2008). The fact that the

[229] There is no free press in Laos. The Press Freedom Index compiled and published by *Reporters Without Borders* ranks Laos 165th out of 179 countries.

first of the thirty 'national teacher competencies' is "*putting into correct practice the policy platform of the party*" (MoE, 2007a, p. 2) highlights the importance of political considerations within education, as they are in all other spheres of civil society. In the village school context, the principals are representatives of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) as either full party members or members of one of the four mass organisations.[230] Thus the principal holds the dual responsibilities of supporting party policy and pursuing the directives of the MoE. Teachers are also members of one or more of the mass organisations and are expected by the principal to implement the Government's edicts aimed at achieving attendance and progression targets in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals.

The findings of this study show that the community of practice in each school was shaped by an overarching set of tasks (monthly reporting, classroom teaching etc), a shared repertoire of 'tools' (textbooks, forms etc), a cultural tradition of seeking social harmony, and a political tradition of not questioning authority.[231] The beginning teachers' induction into this community 'unfolded' through participation in the practices of the workplace. In this sense they experienced what Schwille and Dembele (2007) have described as an informal induction process. The reluctance of the beginning teachers to ask questions or to initiate discussions about teaching and to comply with their colleagues' requests was driven by their personal long-term goal of achieving permanency and a more immediate goal of maintaining social harmony. This goal helped shape the ways in which the beginning teachers related to their colleagues and consequently to the nature of the community of practice.

Without structured professional opportunities for teachers to share ideas and discuss teaching, the interactions of the members of the community of practice worked to reproduce a limited repertoire of strategies. There was no evidence of any collaborative attempts to work towards developing and transforming teaching practices aimed at improving student learning. However, in the highly conservative context of the four Lao schools in this study, one constant was apparent: the community of practice acted to bring its members together into a 'community of compliance'.

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230 The Lao Women's Union, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union, the Lao Front for National Construction and the Lao Federation of Trade Unions.

231 Evans (1998) writes that in the political education sessions of the post 1975 regime, the main message communicated was *"… obedience and conformity to the wishes and views of the state"* (p. 158). However, in more recent times, Stuart-Fox (2008) explains that while political debate is still not encouraged *"the power of the party is felt mainly by those who would challenge it"* (p. 370).

7.6 Conclusion

In this penultimate chapter of the study, attention has been upon drawing together the findings that address the second and third research questions: "*What was the nature of the professional experiences of the beginning teachers?*" and, "*What were the factors that influenced the development of their teaching practices?*" The following summary of answers to these questions completes this chapter.

With respect to the second research question, the study has shown that the professional experiences of the beginning teachers were very similar across the four schools. In no cases was there was a 'honeymoon' period, as described in many other studies. Rather, on arrival, teachers were expected to pick up their responsibilities immediately. While they received some explicit guidance concerning administrative tasks, guidance concerning teaching practices was far more implicit as they were able to observe their colleagues teaching only informally. There was certainly no formal induction program. In one of the schools there was not even a welcome or public acknowledgement of the new staff member. The prevailing attitude was that it was up to the beginning teacher to ask if he or she was uncertain. But as they soon discovered when they did ask, while there was a good level of personal support, there was generally a reluctance by their more experienced colleagues to engage in any discussion that could be construed as 'professional'. The result was that beginning teachers agreed with each other that their colleagues were themselves not sure of new ways of teaching.

In two cases the beginning teachers found themselves with excessively large classes and they all soon discovered that they were expected to uncomplainingly accept virtually any request for assistance that was put to them by their colleagues. And in accordance with their cultural norms, this is what the beginning teachers did. Soon, however, all of them were reeling under the pressure of completing administrative tasks while still trying to learn how to plan and deliver meaningful lessons. They also found themselves wrestling, privately, with dilemmas that challenged their nascent beliefs about teaching. Central to their apprehension was the seeming lack of concern they saw displayed within the school for children's learning. In this climate their initial enthusiasms, for example, to try and implement learner-centred methods, gave way to the expediency of adopting the surrounding practices that they saw would help them to achieve what seemed to be the collective aim of the school – to finish the textbooks on time. In the process, they became aware that the cost of achieving this goal was

that only some of their students would learn. These were the typical experiences of the beginning teachers.

With respect to the third research question, the study has shown that the professional practices of the beginning teachers were primarily forged in the workplace while constrained by the inchoate nature of the repertoire of beliefs, knowledge and skills that they each held. In essence, the beginning teachers were most influenced by the workplace requirements to accomplish a set of 'administrative' tasks, and to 'complete the textbook'. All else was secondary. As was socially and culturally appropriate to their status as 'volunteer teachers', they demonstrated respect for their more experienced colleagues and fulfilled 'requests' and obligations as required. The goal they held in common was to acquire permanency and to this end they appropriated the practices they saw around them which they deemed to be essential for acceptance into the community of practice.

Although they appropriated these practices, this was not done without, at times, a measure of disquiet. The 'dilemmas' which they all faced were resolved only once they began developing their own social strategies. And the key social strategy they each adopted was 'compliance', whether undertaken willingly or somewhat reluctantly. In the context of a hierarchical status-driven culture and a civil society encompassed by a hegemonic political system, it is not surprising that choices were made in this way. Nonetheless, despite the pressure to conform, there were also instances of 'compromise' rather then just 'compliance', because to varying degrees the beginning teachers experimented with a variety of 'learning support initiatives' geared towards helping their students learn. However, in essence, the beginning teachers primarily reproduced the existing practices in the schools and no evidence was seen of any transformation of a community of practice under the influence of a new teacher.

The struggle of the beginning teachers to survive the first year of teaching and acquire a permanent position can be described as a *'dance of permanency'*.[232] The phrase captures the process in which teachers engaged as they confronted dilemmas and made decisions about how to interact with their colleagues and their students. The challenge within the workplace for each of these teachers was to 'learn the rules' of the community of practice. Although in these settings the beginning teachers had no influence on the practice of others, they were able to make decisions regarding their own work and they did so in ways which they hoped would help them attain their ultimate goal of a permanent teaching position.

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[232] After Boaler (2003) *"the dance of agency"* (p. 9).

In this study the professional needs of beginning teachers were shown to stem not only from the gaps identified in the pre-service program but also from the specific conditions found in their workplaces. Consideration of the social and cultural contexts in which the four beginning teachers worked, suggests that what is needed is a support program which considers both beginning teachers as well as older, veteran teachers. With this aim in mind, a set of recommendations for both pre-service and school contexts have been developed which are designed to address the professional needs of beginning teachers in rural Lao primary classrooms. These are now presented in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 8. GUIDELINES: SUPPORT FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

> *What if a new teacher comes to my school? I don't want that person to experience what I did. At first I found it really difficult. I had no idea what I should be doing or how to manage the students and it made me feel so stressed.*
>
> Seng: Visit 4. Interview 5

8.0 Introduction

This study was undertaken to gain an understanding of the professional experiences of beginning teachers in rural primary schools in Laos, and then, more generally, to consider the professional development needs of Lao teachers. Over eighteen months of fieldwork – six spent with lecturers and trainees at the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC) and a further twelve spent visiting four village schools, observing teachers at work and talking to them about their work - extensive data were collected and case records assembled. As I observed the four young teachers who are at the heart of this study, and listened to their concerns, they were attempting to establish their own teaching practices. However, as the quote above by one of them indicates, that first year was for them largely about 'survival'.

The findings from this study are presented in three of the chapters in the thesis. In Chapter 4 the pre-service experiences of trainee-teachers were examined. It was found that during their course trainees were commonly told about 'new methods' of teaching but were rarely given the chance to observe those methods in practice. Even on practicum, many trainees reported having had little opportunity either to observe experienced teachers at work in their classrooms, or to try out new methods of teaching themselves. In fact practicum could more accurately be described as 'work experience' with the majority of trainees receiving little more guidance than being told to take over a class and to teach to the textbook.

In Chapter 5 a number of influences on the teachers' professional lives were explored, in particular those emanating from the contexts of village life, the other staff in the school and the District Education Bureau (DEB) staff. It was found that normal school schedules were frequently interrupted by a multiplicity of village activities and that much of the planning and timetabling required of the teachers was a fiction generated primarily for reporting purposes. It was also shown that there was little contact with the beginning teachers by the DEB, including little contact by the pedagogical advisors whose primary responsibilities were to give professional advice and support to classroom teachers. It was left to the school principal to support the teacher and this was usually done by nominating another staff member to help

the newcomer learn how to undertake a variety of administrative tasks. In most cases the beginning teachers received emotional and social support from their colleagues, but as they also discovered, there were rarely discussions of a professional nature within the schools and little advice given about what to do to help the students learn.

In Chapter 6 a detailed analysis of the classroom observations was presented which showed how the practices of each teacher evolved over the year. Initially the beginning teachers focused on learning the administrative and reporting tasks while their classroom teaching took second place. However, once they got through the initial weeks and began to think more about teaching, each of the beginning teachers tried to employ the learner-centred methods which they had heard about in their training course. However, as the year progressed and pressure mounted to 'complete' the textbooks, 'modern methods' faded and 'traditional methods' came to the fore.

The findings set out in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 were then brought together and discussed in Chapter 7. A number of reported conflicts which the beginning teachers all encountered over the year were encapsulated in the chapter as 'five dilemmas'. They were: whether or not to respond to requests from colleagues for help; whether to report student progress accurately or not; whether to seek professional help from colleagues or whether to remain silent; whether or not to employ learner-centred methods; and whether to respond to the students' learning needs or just simply teach the textbook like everyone else. To resolve the stress of these conflicts, the beginning teachers adopted two key social strategies – mainly 'compliance' with the dominant practices in order to maintain social harmony, but also a degree of 'compromise' as each of the four teachers continued to struggle to find ways to assist their students to learn.

In this concluding chapter the discussion shifts to the implications of the findings. Two sets of recommendations for improving the quality of teacher education are presented. They are put forward in the hope that they will be considered by those charged with reforming teacher education in Laos. The first set of recommendations (8.2) are directed at reconfiguring the pre-service program while the second set (8.3) puts forward ideas for developing a beginning teacher workplace support program. The implications of this study for teacher educators are then discussed (8.4) before suggestions are made for future research (8.5). The chapter concludes with a summary of the thesis (8.6).

8.1 Framing Recommendations

The nature of the community of practice in the schools and the dilemmas which the beginning teachers encountered lead to the conclusion that there are two main areas of professional need. The first involves improving the professional skills of the beginning teachers and the second involves improving communication and collaboration between the beginning teachers and the rest of the school staff.

The first set of seven recommendations is aimed at reconfiguring the pre-service program and on strengthening the resilience and the professional repertoire of knowledge and skills of beginning teachers. The second set of eight recommendations, is focused on ways of establishing a multi-dimensional beginning teacher support program. The aim is to improve professional awareness, communication, knowledge and skills, not only of beginning teachers but also of staff across the school.

The fifteen recommendations aim for 'quality teaching' appropriate to the Lao context. While the official position within the Ministry of Education (MoE) has been to promote "*modern teaching techniques*" and *"student-centred methods*", this study found that these are not well understood and in practice, very difficult to implement. The recommendations go beyond rhetoric to suggest the development of a variety of teaching approaches depending on the purpose of the learning (Alexander, 2000; Pratt, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2004). Following Kittiphanh (2011), it is argued that educational reform in Laos needs to be undertaken in ways appropriate to the social, economic and political conditions of the country. This recognises that the task of supporting teachers will be gradual and will evolve over time. It will also require the active involvement of not only senior officers in the MoE but also of stakeholders at provincial, district and local levels.

8.2 Reconfiguring the Pre-Service Program

Findings from the study suggest that trainee-teachers in Laos need a pre-service program that can act as a 'circuit breaker' to encourage them to critique the pedagogical approaches they experienced during their own education and which continue to dominate practice in rural primary schools. Drawing on the identified teaching practices and professional development needs of the participants in this study, and on the literature on pre-service education reviewed earlier (Kuzmic, 1994; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2010; Guthrie, 2011), it is suggested that pre-service programs provide opportunities for trainee teachers to:

- critically analyse prior learning experiences;
- observe and reflect upon a broad range of teaching strategies;
- engage in guided teaching experiences;
- develop a personal portfolio of resources;
- develop a disposition towards learning to teach through inquiry;
- develop strategies to address typical workplace conditions; and,
- study subjects currently not offered in the diploma program.

The aim of adopting such strategies would be to prevent beginning teachers from being overwhelmed by the strong conservative socialising influences they encounter in schools which result in less than effective teaching practices. Each recommendation (8.2.1 to 8.2.7) is discussed below.

8.2.1 Recommendation 1: Critically analyse prior learning experiences

The study revealed that there were few opportunities for trainees to discuss the characteristics of their own schooling experiences. However, it is argued that an analysis of the beliefs and images about teaching which trainee-teachers bring to their pre-service course can "*serve as filters for making sense of the knowledge and experiences they encounter*" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1016). Providing opportunities for analysing prior learning experiences will allow trainee-teachers in Laos to better discern the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional teaching approaches which they experienced at school.

8.2.2 Recommendation 2: Observe and reflect upon a broad range of teaching strategies

The four teachers in the study had only two opportunities during their training to observe teaching – during the one-week school visit and during their final six-week practicum. It was noted, however, that on *practicum* some trainees were instructed to start teaching immediately and had no opportunity to observe or professionally engage with their cooperating teachers. As the pre-service course unfolded, and various pedagogical practices were discussed in class, many trainees also reported that there were no opportunities to observe what was discussed. Setting up demonstration lessons in schools to make the course material explicit requires coordination and facilitation by the Teacher Education Institutions (TEI) and school staff. However, setting up procedures in the pre-service program for regularly observing and analysing lessons, helps to establish a tradition which can beneficially be carried over into the workplace.

8.2.3 Recommendation 3: Engage in guided teaching experiences

The study revealed that the pre-service course was structured in such a way that there were no opportunities for lecturers to observe their students teaching and therefore no chance to give them guided instruction. Moreover, on *practicum* there were limited opportunities provided by the cooperating teachers to guide the trainees. If their teaching techniques are to improve it is important that trainees are explicitly supported to develop expertise in applying the strategies of explaining, questioning, and classroom management for the conditions which are commonly found in rural schools. In addition to these conventional strategies, practising new teaching techniques, particularly when trainee-teachers have not been exposed to these during their own schooling, will require considerably more support from cooperating teachers and TEI lecturers than is currently available. Time needs to be built into the existing course structure to ensure that these opportunities are provided.

8.2.4 Recommendation 4: Develop a personal portfolio of resources

Throughout their TTC course the trainee-teachers were encouraged to keep notes but for most of them this was all they had when they arrived in their schools. In some schools beginning teachers have access to teachers' guides (published by the MoE) but their availability cannot always be relied upon. In order to prepare trainees for the realities of classroom teaching, Feiman-Nemser (2001) advocates that pre-service programs should assist them to develop a repertoire of teaching skills and resources which they can draw upon when they arrive in their first jobs. The development of a personal portfolio of resources is a central element of a training program for Laos where teaching resources are in very short supply.

8.2.5 Recommendation 5: Develop a disposition towards learning to teach through inquiry

The study highlighted that the pre-service training program for primary teachers delivered only the bare minimum of knowledge and skills regarded as necessary for the trainee-teachers to commence work in the classroom. In recent years, a number of externally funded professional development programs, have supported teacher educators in Laos to examine their own teaching practices.[233] However, developing an attitude that self-reflective research is not just about reporting but for learning, has been slow to filter down into the delivery of the pre-service course. While trainees in the 11+1 program were required to undertake a basic action research project, it appeared to be focused on reporting results rather than on developing a positive attitude towards the utilitarian value of research.

[233] For example, in 2002 a professional development action research project, supported by Save the Children Fund Norway, was trialed across the eight TEIs in Laos. For a discussion regarding its strengths and weaknesses see Bounyasone and Keosada (2011).

When pre-service programs explicitly teach the skills of teacher research and foster the belief that learning to teach is a life-long process, beginning teachers benefit (Rosenholtz, 1989; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2006). If teacher-training programs in Laos are to promote this attitude in trainees then it will be necessary for changes to be made to the program. First, the subject of teacher research needs to be included in the curriculum. Second, teacher educators need to understand the value of adopting such an approach so that it infuses their own teaching practices. And third, a cultural shift needs to occur whereby research into one's own practices is valued as a source of information from which to learn, rather than simply being seen as providing evidence that can be reported to others. Embedding the subject into pre-service programs, taught by lecturers who understand its value, will help establish a foundation in trainees for developing a positive disposition towards life-long teacher learning.

8.2.6 Recommendation 6: Develop strategies to address typical workplace conditions

At the end of the 2009-2010 school year, during Stage 3 of this study, a 're-call workshop' was organised in Pakse for 30 teachers who had completed their first year of teaching.[234] At the workshop participants posed questions and raised concerns about their experiences as beginning teachers. One session was devoted to the analysis of scenarios based on common classroom issues that had been observed during the Stage 2 fieldwork in schools. The scenarios were discussed in small groups and the participants invited to share their experiences and to suggest solutions to the problems raised. At the end of the workshop the participants rated this activity as *"extremely useful"* for helping them devise responses to commonly occurring classroom problems.

It is important that the TEI courses allow trainees time to consider problems which they are likely to encounter in the schools, and also to encourage them to work collaboratively to find solutions to such problems. These tasks will help trainees develop a sense of shared purpose and perhaps of shared identity. Support for this approach is found in Loughran *et al*., (2001) who recommend that pre-service programs should assist trainees to establish peer networks during their studies which can continue after they start work and can be drawn upon as an informal source of support. In a time of rapidly improving communications in Laos, even in remote areas, it is becoming increasingly possible for trainee-teachers to be able to maintain links with some of their college friends once they start work.

[234] The Stage 3 Beginning Teacher Re-call Workshop, held in Pakse in June 2010, is described in Chapter 6, Footnote 212.

8.2.7 Recommendation 7: Study subjects currently not offered in the diploma program

This study has shown that because of the restricted nature of their pre-service program (see Section 7.1), the four beginning teachers all had large gaps in their knowledge and skills and consequently encountered a number of classroom problems that they were ill-equipped to handle. Three areas which are suggested for inclusion in pre-service programs are (i) teaching literacy and numeracy in multi-level classes; (ii) investigating the meaning of learner-centred approaches; and, (iii) implementing local curricula. Each of these areas is briefly discussed below.

(i) Teaching literacy and numeracy in multi-level classes

One of the key problems raised by participants in the re-call workshop, was how to help students not working at their age-appropriate grade level. As automatic progression of students becomes policy in Laos, this challenge needs to be addressed. During the fieldwork it was observed that even in relatively small classes there were many students who were unable to complete the most basic tasks. At best they sat quietly, but more often they disrupted the teacher's attempts to deliver the lesson. Specific strategies to assist teachers to work with students across a wide range of abilities need to be designed and incorporated into the subjects of Lao Language, Mathematics and the World Around Us.

During the fieldwork for this study there was no evidence that monthly test results had any influence upon what material teachers reviewed or re-taught. Helping trainee-teachers to understand the reasons why formative assessment is important, how it can be applied in class, and how this knowledge can be used to adjust teaching practices in order to help all students in diverse ability level classrooms learn, is a priority. This will mean significant development of appropriate formative assessment tools. The findings suggest that it is critical that trainees acquire a more effective repertoire of tools and accompanying pedagogical practices that they can draw upon with confidence when they commence teaching.

(ii) Investigating the meaning of learner-centred approaches

The findings indicate that beginning teachers arrive in Lao primary classrooms with only superficial ideas about 'learner-centred' approaches (see Section 6.3). These findings are supported by other research in Laos such as that by Dahlström (2007), and Chounlamany and Kounphilaphanh (2011). If the quality of teaching is to improve then it is vital that trainee-teachers develop an understanding of not just the mechanics of the strategies but also of the underlying reasons for using those strategies. Without developing such understanding within the pre-service program, the teacher's ability to use the strategies that have been promoted as

learner-centred, will remain primarily mechanical. It is likely that teachers will continue to employ the skills for 'performance' teaching but not to promote problem solving or to develop independent thinking.

(iii) Implementing local curricula

As discussed in Section 7.3.5, none of the four beginning teachers in this study had heard of the directive from the MoE that teachers should supplement the textbook lessons with 'local curricula'. As a starting point the TEIs could provide trainee-teachers with the tools for designing and implementing curricula that go beyond the textbook. For example, festivals and events, growing crops and the problem of UXOs,[235] are all local topics which could be used to design local curricula and support the teaching of literacy and mathematics. However, without the understanding and acceptance of such new material by the rest of the staff, it would not be possible for beginning teachers to introduce such measures on their own. The need for professional development across the school is discussed in the next section.

8.3 Establishing a Beginning Teacher Support Program

In 2006, the Ministry of Education published a *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2010) and Action Plan (2006-2015)* (MoE, 2006a) which called for the development of an "*induction program*" (p. 11) for new teachers. However, the problem in Laos with 'induction' is that the focus will be upon orientating the beginning teachers to the current teaching practices in their schools, which, as this study has shown, generally need to be reformed. The issue is the same as that raised by Britton *et al*. (2003) - whether "*induction serves to preserve the status quo or to help transform teaching, teachers and the profession"* (p. 334). This is also the debate in many developing countries, where induction programs for new teachers are focused on the individual without consideration of the context in which the teacher works (Johnson & Monk, 2000).

While most developed countries have systematic programs of support for beginning teachers, including mentoring and coaching programs, more recently the idea of establishing communities of teachers who come together voluntarily to discuss teaching and learning has started to gain currency. Meyer (2002), for example, argues that mentoring programs can work against beginning teachers by inhibiting discussion. He recommends the establishment of "*novice teacher learning communities"* (p.27) in which he claims 'honest reflective

[235] Lessons for primary school students on the topic of UXOs have already been developed by staff at MoES with support from World Education. See website for a description of the Lao UXO Education Program, See <http: www.worlded.org>.

dialogue' and a 'disclosure of practice' are more likely to occur than in the typically hierarchical setting of school mentoring programs.

The findings of this study provide insights into how beginning teachers might be supported in the workplace and give rise to the set of recommendations (8.3.1 to 8.3.8) which together frame a beginning teacher support program. The envisaged program is one that will equip beginning teachers with a personal repertoire of tools to deal with common classroom problems and help re-define the relationships between beginning teachers and their colleagues. The suggested program would be structured around eight elements - four aimed at developing the teaching repertoire of individual beginning teachers, three at developing the professional knowledge and skills of the whole staff, and one aimed at improving the effectiveness of the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC). The elements of a beginning teacher support program are:

- establish an initial orientation to work meeting;
- conduct a beginning teacher end-of-year re-call workshop;
- establish a beginning teacher telephone advisory service;
- encourage the development of informal support networks;
- establish a consensus about 'quality teaching';
- strengthen schools as learning communities;
- strengthen school leadership; and
- improve effectiveness of Village Education Development Committees.

Each element constitutes a recommendation (8.3.1 to 8.3.8) and these are discussed below.

8.3.1 Recommendation 8: Establish an initial orientation to work meeting

As documented in the case records for this study, initial orientation for beginning teachers is sometimes undertaken centrally in a district office by staff of the DEB. For example, in some districts the 'volunteer' teachers[236] are summonsed to a meeting at the DEB prior to the start of the school year where they are all reminded of their duties to their country, to the village and to their students. However, the more usual procedure is for the beginning teachers to make their own way to their village school where they are briefed on their responsibilities by the principal or by one or two senior staff.

After observing the mainly informal way that the beginning teachers acquired information about their teaching positions, it is recommended that one or more formal

[236] Only one of the four beginning teachers was called to a central orientation meeting by the relevant DEB. See the case records in Appendix 1 for descriptions of the way each teacher was introduced to the school, its staff and its students.

orientation meetings be organised at the start of the school year in each province, jointly managed by the DEBs and the TEI. An outcome of the re-call workshop organised as part of this study in 2010, was the preparation of a *Beginning Teachers Handbook* by lecturers from the Pakse TTC based on suggestions from participants about the areas where they felt they needed guidance.[237] This handbook provides a model of the type of material that should be prepared and distributed to new staff at the time of the formal orientation meeting.

8.3.2 Recommendation 9: Conduct a beginning teacher end-of-year re-call workshop

The findings in this study show that while the experienced teachers in the schools offered emotional and social support to their younger colleagues, the beginning teachers felt unable to discuss with them many of their concerns about professional teaching matters primarily because of their own low status and lack of confidence. One way of addressing this problem could be to hold annual regional re-call workshops for teachers in the first few years of their careers. Having participants who are mostly all at the same level of the educational hierarchy is in keeping with Lao cultural ways of working and is more likely to encourage open discussion.[238] In order to use limited resources more efficiently it is recommended that, depending on numbers, the participants in the re-call workshops are all those in the region who have just completed their first, second or third year of teaching.

8.3.3 Recommendation 10: Establish a beginning teacher telephone advisory service

Another strategy for assisting individual beginning teachers is to establish some form of direct support service. An outcome of this research is that the Pakse TTC recognised the need for beginning teachers to have access to advice. Subsequently in 2012, the College requested financial assistance from an Australian NGO to support their lecturers to visit and give advice to new graduates in rural schools. Without this external funding, however, such visits would generally not be possible.

In many countries support services are provided via the internet. For example Herrington *et al*., (2006) describes a project in Australia that combines online mentoring with opportunities for beginning teachers to engage in online discussion forums with other teachers. The project also builds on networks established during pre-service training to reduce feelings of professional isolation when the trainee-teachers start work. However, the cost of computers and smart-phones and the limited internet availability in Laos make such an

[237] The Handbook was drafted after the workshop and printed with support from APHEDA, an Australian NGO. In 2012, again with funding from APHEDA, the Handbook was reprinted and distributed to graduates from the Pakse TEI. See Appendix 18 for a list of the topics covered in the Beginning Teachers' Handbook.

[238] The 2010 re-call workshop also involved a few staff from the Pakse TEI as facilitators. Consequently there was still a reservation on the part of some of the participants to talk openly about the inadequacies of the pre-service course.

approach unviable at this time.[239]

There is, however, a real possibility that the recently extended mobile phone network makes a telephone advisory service viable for many beginning teachers even in some of the remoter parts of the country. The recommendation here is that a formal advisory service specifically supporting beginning teachers be established. This practical and sustainable approach would involve training a small group of teacher educators who could be contacted for advice by telephone by beginning teachers.

8.3.4 Recommendation 11: Establish a beginning teacher support network

The four beginning teachers in this study all reported using their mobile phones to maintain informal contact with fellow teachers they met during their pre-service course. Alongside the beginning teacher advisory service put forward in Recommendation 10, is the suggestion that an informal support network between beginning teachers be established. The aim of encouraging young teachers to link up in this way is to build up their resilience so they are better able to cope with the problems and dilemmas they are likely to encounter in the first months after starting work.

The idea of establishing professional teacher networks in Laos is not new. It was first put forward in 2006 as a key element of the *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2010) and Action Plan (2006-2015).* Later that same year the MoE commissioned a small research study (TEADC, 2006a) which attempted to formulate a set of guidelines for the establishment of such networks. While the study makes reference to beginning teachers receiving *"support from PAs and TEI teachers, in cooperation with their head teacher"* (p. 30), it makes no reference to networks being established between new teachers. This idea of informal support networks could be raised in the pre-service program and promoted when trainees access the advisory service and meet in the recall workshops.

8.3.5 Recommendation 12: Establish a consensus about 'quality teaching'

Before a whole school approach to beginning teacher support can be considered, there needs to be a consensus as to what constitutes 'quality teaching'. Without a common understanding of this concept, at least at the local level and preferably at the district level, the term will continue to be used as little more than a slogan without substance. In theory, the existing *National Charter of Teacher Competencies* (MoE, 2007a) provides the direction, but this needs to be operationalised and the official discourse of 'quality' unpacked. Reaching an

[239] About 9% of the population are able to access the internet (World Bank, 2012).

agreement about the meaning of 'quality' in rural classroom settings will be a critical step towards creating the conditions for improved teacher learning. However, reaching an agreement about 'quality teaching' that teacher educators and school staff can all work towards will require an analysis of the existing quality indicators and decisions made about how these competencies can be translated into practices appropriate to the conditions found in rural Lao primary schools. This work could be foreshadowed in the proposed beginning teacher orientation workshops and later continued in whole-school professional development sessions. Through investing both time and resources to establish such a process it is anticipated that the dichotomy between learner-centred and teacher-centred approaches can be resolved and a pedagogy can emerge which is focused on authentic student-learning within a Lao context and driven by universal principles of good teaching as described by Brophy (1999).

8.3.6 Recommendation 13: Strengthen schools as learning communities

The transformation of the rural primary school culture in Laos presents a major challenge to those in charge of school reform. As this study has shown, the priorities of school principals are fixed on meeting the external DEB requirements to collate school data and to submit reports and plans. Principals rely on teachers to comply with their directives to 'complete' the textbooks and the administrative requirements of collecting test results and providing reports. However, these requirements are experienced by young teachers as onerous especially in the way they impact negatively on the time left for teaching.

Major shifts in the culture of rural primary schools in Laos are unlikely to happen without first being initiated by the MoE and given ongoing support for the change process. A simple first step could be for the MoE to encourage principals to organise time for teachers to discuss teaching matters in a purposeful way without fear of repercussion. Creating conditions which are more conducive to teacher and student learning requires a lessening of the degree of control and pressure on teachers and creating a mutuality of tasks which can be undertaken as 'shared enterprises' (Wenger, 1998). To do so in the Lao context could include encouraging teachers to share classes, getting them to work across grades with ability groups, helping them to design local curricula and supporting each other to initiate new teaching ideas. These activities can serve to move the school culture towards one focused on improving teaching and learning.

Studies have shown (Kardos *et al*., 2001) that resilience in beginning teachers is more likely to develop when the focus of the school culture is on improving student learning. As Wong (2004) has argued, the best support programs for new teachers *"are structured within*

learning communities where new and veteran teachers interact and treat each other with respect and are valued for their respective contributions" (p. 50). Creating such an environment will not happen immediately or easily. It will require skillful leadership and its success will in large measure depend on whether, from within a deferential culture, the principal is able to manage the inclusion of both younger and older voices.

8.3.7 Recommendation 14: Strengthen school leadership

In this study, principals were seen at different times to provide 'guidance' on administrative matters, to give 'protection' against outside visitors such as the occasional government official, and to advocate informally at the DEB on behalf a beginning teacher seeking permanency (Section 5.4). While their support was important, its limited reach is in contrast to the findings in many of the studies reviewed in Section 2.2.4 on the role of the principal. In developed countries, principals typically have considerably greater responsibility for providing pedagogical advice to the staff than was seen to occur in Lao primary schools (Stoll, 1999; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Verspoor, 2003; Fullan, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Hardman *et al*., 2008). In only one of the four schools in the study did the principal take it upon herself to initiate a discussion with a beginning teacher about teaching. The principals were primarily focused on administrative and managerial tasks and less able to provide professional pedagogical support.

During the time the research was undertaken there were professional development opportunities for some primary principals, but this was limited in scope[240]. The wide-spread provision of professional development through which principals can learn about professional leadership still needs to be addressed. It is therefore suggested that professional development to encourage principals to develop school learning communities could be undertaken from within the beginning teacher support program. Supporting principals to learn about the benefits of creating whole staff opportunities to discuss pedagogical matters could commence with the establishment of the beginning teacher 'orientation meetings' with separate meetings held to show principals how to support beginning teachers[241] particularly on pedagogical matters. Principals could also learn about the beginning teachers' advisory service and network which could compliment support provided at the school level.

8.3.8 Recommendation 15: Improve effectiveness of VEDCs

[240] One component of the EQIP II project aimed to provide *"2,500 school principals in 71 districts with 12 days of inservice annually for 4 years"* (MoE, 2005a, p. 38) with an emphasis on ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In practice, only a fraction of this training was ever actually delivered as envisaged. At best around 20% of the primary principals across the country attended one-off sessions of a few days of training.

[241] The principal may choose to assign a designated member of staff to provide this support.

In 2008, Village Education Development Committees (VEDC) were established by ministerial decree as sub-committees of Village Committees (VC).[242] A central responsibility of the VEDC is to organise material support for the local village school and, where necessary, its staff. However, in the case of the four villages in this study only one VEDC was functioning to the extent that it was able to secure financial support from the community members, through the VC, for the beginning teacher. In this case the VEDC arranged for the unpaid beginning teacher to receive a regular nominal stipend.

Another finding of the study is that there is no transparency with respect to the rules and procedures that are followed in the DEBs for granting permanency to teachers. It appears that further advocacy work is required in order to encourage VEDCs to provide material support to the unpaid 'volunteer' beginning teachers in the indefinite waiting period before they are made permanent government workers. As seen in this study not all principals take on such an advocacy role. It therefore appears that more direct encouragement may need to be given by the District Education Bureau staff to VEDC members to ensure that local communities understand why beginning teachers need material support.

8.4 Implications of this study for Teacher Educators

The recommendations put forward above recognise the need for a cultural shift in both the TEIs and the school system. The implementation of the recommendations will depend upon harnessing the resources within the MoE, forging collaborations between all stakeholders including TEI staff, DEB staff and school staff, and having competent and motivated teacher educators. Feiman-Nemser's (2001) call to improve teacher learning for teachers is equally important for teacher educators: *"If we want schools to produce more powerful learning on the part of the students, we have to offer more powerful learning opportunities to teachers"* (p. 1014).

As studies in other countries have shown (Britton *et al*., 2003) there is no simple solution to the complex issue of supporting beginning teachers. Providing immediate support to ensure 'survival' is one thing; however, helping teachers to develop their practices so as to improve student-learning outcomes, should ultimately be the aim of teacher education reform. What is obvious in Laos is that modifying the existing pre-service program and establishing new workplace support programs will require substantial effort. To a large extent, this effort will be carried by the teacher educators in the TEIs as they endeavour to improve their own

[242] Ministerial Decree No 230/MoE.DoP.08, (MoE, 2008c). See Section 5.2.2 for a discussion of the role of the VEDC.

skills and capabilities so as to take on the set of responsibilities called for in the *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010)* (MoE, 2006a, p. 8).

Although the four beginning teachers in this study identified gaps in their pre-service course, during the interviews at the end of their first year of teaching they stated that it was the TEI lecturers who were best placed to help them address their pedagogical problems. In their view colleagues were unwilling or unable to give them advice and, in their experience, they found that pedagogical advisors from the DEBs had provided little or no pedagogical support. Similar sentiments were expressed by other beginning teachers during the end-of-year re-call workshop. Here, one is reminded of the argument that the people best able to support learning in the workplace are those who can help others engage in honest reflection and critical analysis (Engeström, 1994; Borko, 2004). Developing enough facilitators with these kinds of skills will require an investment in professional training for many TEI staff.

The recommendations in this study envisage TEI staff working in collaboration with DEB and school staff to:

- arrange demonstration lessons in schools;
- provide guided teaching experiences;
- facilitate 'orientation to work' meetings and re-call workshops;
- establish a phone advisory service;
- encourage informal networks between beginning teachers; and
- facilitate professional development programs for all teachers and principals in any school where a beginning teacher is posted.

In a poor country such as Laos, collaboration between TEIs and schools is dependent on such basics as having sufficient money for fuel to enable TEI lecturers to travel by motorbike to schools. When collaboration occurs, the lecturers benefit by learning more about the realities of classroom life and this can inform the delivery of their pre-service courses. Lecturers can also critique current practices in schools with trainees in order to better prepare them for classroom conditions; and classroom teachers benefit by being able to work with lecturers to explore how approaches taught in the TEIs can be translated into practice.

Fostering coherence between theory and practice and increasing the collaboration between TEIs and schools requires both political will and financial resources. Within the MoE there will first need to be a willingness to cooperate at the departmental level, for example between the Department of Teacher Training which is responsible for the TEIs and the Department of Primary and Pre-School Education which is responsible for primary schools

and the DEBs. While increasing the collaboration between TEIs and schools will be a formidable task, commencing dialogue between the senior stakeholders about how this can be achieved would be a first step.

8.5 Directions for Future Research

This study has provided an in-depth view of the teaching practices of beginning teachers working in rural primary schools in Laos and of their professional interactions. While an earlier study reported on the practices of Lao teachers (TEADC, 2004a), this study has gone further and examined the reasons why teachers adopt or resist particular pedagogical practices. However, many questions about the situation of beginning teachers in Laos remain unanswered. Four areas for further investigation are suggested below.

First, what is the situation of beginning teachers working in smaller schools? There are many first-year-out teachers in Laos who are posted to work in remote 'one-teacher' schools. It would be valuable to know, when they are not pressured by a community of practice to conform, the extent to which teachers utilise what they learnt in their pre-service course.

Second, what is the impact on young teachers of having to leave their home villages and work in other locations? Three of the four teachers in this study returned to work in their own village and this increased the pressure on them in terms of community obligations but perhaps limited the support available to them from the VEDC. When beginning teachers are posted as 'volunteers' to schools in villages where they have no friends or relatives, what is the level of material support which they receive from the community?

Third, what happens to beginning teachers after their first year of teaching? Once the beginning teachers have 'survived' their first year of teaching do they then attempt to put into action more of the techniques advocated during their pre-service program?

Fourth, if ethnographic case study research is undertaken by Lao researchers working within their own cultural sensitivities, would the interpretations and findings be significantly different to the ones presented in this study? The question is whether Lao researchers would identify similar dilemmas and social strategies or whether other issues would emerge.

Commenting on both the limitations and the strengths of qualitative research, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) write *"you will never understand it all, but you will know where next to look, what new questions to ask, and what sense it might have for yourselves and for others"* (p. 179). The professional experiences of the four beginning teachers documented in this

study, provide a base for future comparison. This interpretation of the data has led to several guidelines for the reconfiguration of pre-service training and to proposed support programs for beginning teachers. Hopefully a direction for future research will also be to monitor any implementation of these guidelines.

8.6 Concluding Summary

This study is the first in Laos to use an ethnographic case study methodology to examine the professional experiences of teachers in rural primary schools. The study grew out of my own work as a 'specialist' advisor on teacher training and out of my desire to identify forms of assistance that might help Lao teachers, especially those just starting out, to improve the quality of their teaching. By adopting a longitudinal approach it was possible, across the space of a year, to observe and analyse the teaching practices of four beginning teachers. The study highlights the social and cultural conditions which impact upon such teachers and provides a contextualized account of their professional experiences.

Evidence is presented that shows how on arrival in their schools the four beginning teachers all found themselves in 'restrictive' learning environments. Under the influence of the other staff the new teachers soon left behind much of what they had learnt in college and took on, usually willingly but sometimes with a degree of reluctance, the teaching practices of the school's experienced staff. In general, the encompassing community of practice operated to ensure compliance to its own patterns and behaviours. With little to guide them beyond their own limited experience and personal beliefs about education, the beginning teachers soon adopted strategies of deference and compliance to maintain social harmony in the workplace. In all cases, the professional support they received was limited and opportunities for teacher learning restricted by a school culture that did not encourage professional discussion between teachers of different status.

The findings have implications for designing both pre-service programs and inservice support programs. In Laos, while the professional knowledge and skills of college lecturers is increasing, lecturers still need time to create a learning culture within their own institutions. At the core of reconfiguring the pre-service programs the TEIs need to:

- address the issues associated with *practicum* that are reported in this study;
- encourage an inquiry approach so that learning to teach becomes a life-long process;
- work more closely with cooperating teachers to ensure that the methodologies promoted in the TEIs are demonstrated in real classroom situations; and,

- show cooperating teachers how to give constructive guidance and feedback to trainees.

The beginning teachers commenced work with a limited repertoire of teaching skills. On the whole they were ill-prepared to deal with either their students' learning difficulties or with the workplace constraints they encountered. Even with their newly acquired knowledge of modern teaching techniques, they were unable to influence the practices in the schools. Quite understandably they were viewed as neophytes and their practices quickly subsumed by what in reality was a 'community of compliance'. Building up the resilience of young teachers so they can withstand the pressure within the workplace to conform will be a necessary starting point for any reform program.

In developed contexts, induction programs are usually directed at the individual; however, support for beginning teachers in Laos cannot adequately be met solely by targeting individual teachers. If the quality of teaching in Lao primary schools is to improve then all staff need to be involved in the reform process – experienced teachers who graduated many years ago just as much as any beginning teacher. Generally, teachers in rural primary schools in Laos have rarely had the opportunity to engage in professional development. Under these circumstances all staff members could benefit from involvement in programs that explore how the learning needs of the students might be supported more effectively. However, enlisting the expertise of veteran teachers while still giving due regard to the beginning teachers and the knowledge of modern pedagogies they bring from their pre-service course, will present a major challenge to the implementation of reforms.

While the global programs of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals continue to influence education policy in Laos, the teachers interviewed for this study knew nothing of such initiatives. Their concern was to help their students learn the textbook content. In the last interview conducted for this study one of the beginning teachers spoke about his first year of teaching: *"I really don't know why some have learnt and others haven't. I suppose I will have to think about it more next year."* With no one to turn to, this teacher, like others in Laos, will continue to struggle alone until a beginner teacher support program is established. For those who carry the responsibility for seeing that educational reforms are implemented within the schools, the creation of such programs may well be the key to harnessing the youthful enthusiasm which beginning teachers bring to their work.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Case Records: Four Beginning Teachers[1]

In this Appendix the worlds of the beginning teachers are presented through four case records. They are drawn from the 'case studies' and *"...allow readers to experience the happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions"* (Stake 2005, p. 450). Justification for this usage, and an elaboration on the approach, is included in Chapter 3. The case records provide the reader with the contextual knowledge necessary for an appreciation of the issues discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 when the professional experiences of the beginning teachers are examined.

The four records all have the same basic structure: the initial visit made by the researcher to meet the beginning teacher is described and this sets the scene for documenting the school experiences of the teacher. Each record outlines a little of the personal circumstances of the teacher and that person's path to qualification. Details of the school where the teacher has been appointed are given - its students, staff and principal - and relationships with the community where the teacher is working are discussed. Formative experiences during the first few weeks of teaching are recorded and each case record closes with some summary observations about the beginning teacher over the year. Through these brief 'portraits' a little of both the mundane (unruly children; mindless copying) and the extraordinary (enormous classes; unpaid employment) are used to illustrate common as well as idiosyncratic aspects of primary school teaching in rural Lao contexts.

The case records are written from the perspective of the researcher. They are personalised accounts, at times in the first person and the present tense, and describe a little of the researcher adapting to life in unfamiliar surroundings. However, the central focus is on the beginning teacher as he or she comes to grips with the reality of what it is to be a primary school teacher in a rural classroom in Laos. It is therefore the researcher's observations of and commentary on the contexts in which the teachers are trying to establish themselves as professionals that underlie the studies. These observations are enhanced through statements from the beginning teachers themselves and from the comments of others around them.

There is one voice, however, that is not heard directly – that of Ms Sivilay Phommachanh, the interpreter who was there throughout the duration of the fieldwork. As discussed earlier, her contribution to the research process was vital and when, in the case records, descriptions of interactions are given or extracts from interviews reproduced, it

[1] All of the sections in Appendix 1 begin with the letters 'CR' (for Case Record) to distinguish them from the sections in the body of the thesis.

should be remembered that Ms Sivilay is also present as an active participant in the procedures.

The situations portrayed through these records provide the background for a more focused exploration of the impact of the social and cultural conditions in the schools on the professional practices of the four beginning teachers (Chapter 5). The case records also provide the context for a closer examination of the manner in which the teaching practices of the beginning teachers evolved over their first year in the classroom and the findings which result are presented in Chapter 6.

CASE RECORD 1

MR BOUNYANG

SUKUMNOYI VILLAGE SCHOOL

Case Record 1: Mr Bounyang

That boy that I told off in front of the class - he is the policeman's son but he is really naughty. This morning I caught him going into the office to catch mice to tease the other children with. If I am not tough on him and on the others, they won't learn anything!

Bounyang: Visit 1. Interview 1

CR 1.1 The first visit

In September 2009, on the first day of the school year, I drove out of Pakse, the capital of Champasak Province, heading for Paksong, a small town up on the Bolaven Plateau. The road between the two towns climbs steadily for almost 50 km and on the way I counted the schools that were dotted along either side of the highway – about 20 in all. Four or five of these were complete schools catering for the five primary grades. The rest were small, one-room, multi-grade 'satellite' schools offering only Grades 1 and 2. All the schools were extremely basic and built from roughly sawn timber, probably by local villagers. And as I passed by I thought, with a touch of trepidation, of the many visits I planned to make over the next nine months to observe life in rural primary schools in Laos.

This trip signalled the start of my fieldwork and I was concerned to see that everything got off to a good start. I had an appointment with the Deputy Director of the Paksong District Education Bureau (DEB), somebody who I had known for several years. I was visiting in order to pay my respects, to present the letters of authorisation for my research from the Vice-Minister of Education and from the Director of the Champasak Provincial Education Service (PES), and then to meet up with the new teacher, Bounyang, and accompany him to his school. The Deputy had told me by phone to come early but had warned *"You will have to wait as things will be busy; it's the start of the term."* Suitably forewarned I came and waited, and even though it was drizzly and cold, I sat outside on the veranda where I could see the hustle and bustle of visitors arriving at the DEB and tried to imagine how similar scenes were being played out that morning in the other 141 DEBs scattered across the county. Here there were about 20 people milling around on tractors and motor-bikes. Some were teachers who had come to pick up textbooks and supplies of chalk; others were principals hoping to get the salaries owing from last year for their staff; and a few were beginning teachers waiting to be told where they had been posted to teach.

After a time I was called to the Deputy's office and informed that Bounyang had been assigned to a remote school about 40km away: *"It is in a village that really needs teachers. When the Village Head comes to pick up Bounyang you can follow the tractor and then you will know how to get to the school - just follow them."* I thanked the Deputy and went outside again and waited. Bounyang arrived on the back of a motorbike a short while later. He greeted me and informed me that two weeks earlier the DEB had said he would teach in his home village, but then, only a few days before the start of school, the Director of the DEB had offered him a position in a different, more remote village and implied that if he accepted it would probably mean he would get permanency in his first year. The offer, with its bait of permanency, and therefore a salary, had been too good to refuse. So here he was, having said his goodbyes, standing outside in the drizzle, clutching a small packed bag, and waiting for the Village Head to arrive and take him off into the hinterlands to start his career.

As we waited a man arrived on a motorbike. This, I was told, was the Principal of the school in Bounyang's home village. He seemed upset and called Bounyang over. After a few words the Principal knocked on the Deputy Director's door and went in. Then a truck-load of men arrived and started talking to Bounyang. They turned out to be the Village Committee members who had followed the Principal in, and clearly they weren't happy either. After 20 minutes or so the Principal emerged from the DEB office and everyone could see that the offer was off and that Bounyang would be returning to his home village. Bounyang neither reacted nor said anything – he just looked. However, before we left he introduced me to the men from his village. Now that they had retrieved their teacher, one of them was in the mood to talk:

> *Bounyang is the first teacher from our village to complete a teaching qualification. When we heard that he was being sent to another school we were shocked and angry. So we decided we had to come here to tell the DEB that we wanted him back. Bounyang is our teacher and we need him to stay.*
>
> Village Committee Member: Visit 1. Interview 1

As we left the DEB and headed for Bounyang's village the morning drizzle gave way to pouring rain. The Principal set off on his motorbike, then the men in the truck. I followed with Bounyang in my car. After a 20 minute drive we arrived at the village school but the rooms were closed and there was no sign of students or teachers - it appeared the weather had kept everyone home. While Bounyang waited outside the Principal took me into his office. He told me that the DEB had already informed him of my visits and their purpose, and that he

was *"to make sure the school looked after me."* I gathered by this that it was his responsibility to see that I did not cause them any problems. At the end of our discussion he took me outside and pointed to the end of the school building where some forlorn wooden posts spoke of a stalled extension. Could I help buy some corrugated iron so that they could complete the building? I explained that I was doing private research and not attached to a project, but with many cautionary qualifications I promised I would try my best to locate a source of funds.[2]

CR 1.2 Family life

We left the school and Bounyang took me to his family home where his sister was preparing lunch. Like the rest of the houses in the village it was built in the traditional style of wood, and raised up high off the ground. It was unpainted, and with the wooden shutters closed against the rain, very dark inside. In the centre of the house was a large open room where guests were received, meals eaten and where the family watched television. Along the side of this living space were four small bedrooms. The house had an upstairs kitchen built on the side and cooking was done on a charcoal burner. The kitchen also had running water which came from a tap connected to a hose which ran from the pump next to the well in the corner of the garden. Chickens and ducks roamed underneath the house and the area was used as a garage for the tractor as well as a place to store the numerous wooden trays required during the coffee drying season.

Bounyang's mother joined us and welcomed me warmly. She explained how ten people lived in her house - her eldest son, Bounyang, and second youngest son were single and shared one room, her youngest son lived with his wife and daughter in another room, her daughter lived with her husband and two children in the third room, and she had her own room which most nights she shared with one or more of her grandchildren. When I came for a week at a time she would arrange for me to stay with her brother's family as there were too many children in her house *"and that's not good for getting a proper sleep*." The issue of a *falang* staying in the village did not pose any problem. The village was used to the occasional foreign coffee advisor or buyer staying overnight and the Village Committee had gained general permission for such visitors from the district level of control.

[2] In 2010 I was able to keep my promise when I put the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) in touch with a private donor from Australia who generously provided the school with AU$1,500 to fix the roof and construct a well.

CR 1.3 Becoming a teacher

As we ate lunch I gained the impression that Bounyang's mother was pleased with the way things had worked out - her son was the first person in the village to become a teacher and now he would be staying to work in his home village after all. I asked Bounyang to explain how he had come to train as a teacher, knowing that it was quite an achievement for someone from his village to get as far as he had. He spoke of how, after high school, a couple of his friends had joined the army and that most others had returned to work with their family growing coffee, but as for himself:

> *I wanted to be a teacher but I didn't think it would be possible because of my family situation – we are poor and it costs money to study. At the end of school I passed the exams with good marks but I didn't get a government scholarship. I thought that was it, but my uncle encouraged me and took me down to Pakse to the teachers' college to take the entrance test. When I passed the test I asked my mother whether she would agree for me to become a teacher and she said 'Yes, if you want to, you can do that. I will help you'.*
>
> Bounyang: Visit 1. Interview 1

Bounyang's mother supported him with money raised from her coffee and with a loan from her brother-in-law which she was paying back over a few years. She estimated that the total cost of fees and living expenses to board at the college had come to around four million kip or about US$500, roughly equal to the yearly income of a farmer in the village.

Before I left and drove back to Pakse I asked Bounyang how he felt about the morning's sudden turn of events. He gave a shrug and replied *"It's alright - I guess it's up to them - at least I have a job!"* But he told me he was worried about teaching a Grade 1 class rather than older children. He also knew that now he was unlikely to gain permanency for several years, and that he would therefore be dependent on the village to provide him with some financial support. As the rain continued to pelt down, I said goodbye to Bounyang and his mother and left, wondering whether school would open the next day. It was going to be six weeks before I would find out how Bounyang had settled into his job. Although I kept in touch with weekly phone calls, and heard enough to know that he wasn't finding it easy, he gave away no details of the issues he was facing, and for these I would have to wait.

CR 1.4 The school

I returned to Bounyang's village six weeks later only to find that the school was again closed for the day because of fog and rain, but I was able to use the time to talk to members of the Village Committee. I learnt that three years earlier the school had been located at another site closer to the centre of the village. It was a 'satellite' school offering only Grades 1 to 3 and any student who wanted to finish the last two grades had to walk about three kilometres to the central school in a neighbouring village. In 2004 the Village Committee decided to build a *vat*[3] on the same site as the school and for three years the villagers laboured over its construction. While this was going on school continued nearby in the original building. In 2007 the *vat* was completed and the villagers then turned their attention to the school. The wooden building was dismantled and then reassembled on its present location about a kilometre away. The villagers also decided to build on another classroom so that children would be able to attend Grades 4 and 5 and finish primary education in their home village.

The school now sits in an open field on the edge of the village separated from the road by a belt of coffee bushes. The area is quiet and removed from the noise and activities of the village. The surrounding fields are planted with thick groves of coffee bushes which provide cover for 'bush' toilets; however, digging a well and building some toilets are listed in the

[3] A *vat*, or Buddhist monastery, is the religious, cultural and communal centre of virtually all ethnic Lao villages.

village plans and will happen when funds become available. In the meantime students take their own water to school for drinking and for watering the small flower gardens planted during their Friday afternoon ‘labour’ lessons. Students living closest to the school are responsible for bringing jugs of water for the teachers.

The school is a sturdy structure, built by the villagers from a combination of locally milled timber and second-hand pieces of corrugated iron. The classroom floors are dirt, the walls made of thick, roughly cut, uneven planks of wood which do not reach the ground, and the rooms cannot be locked. There are no shutters, just a lattice of slats nailed across the window spaces. The walls keep out the cold wind that blows across the plateau, but when it rains, as it often does, water runs in underneath and the students have to move their tables closer to the middle of the room. During the day small dots of sky can be seen through the corrugated iron roof.

Corrugated iron is also used to divide the building up into four classrooms. These internal walls do not meet the roof-line and although they prevent the students in the different classes from seeing each other, they do not stop paper aeroplanes from flying between the classes when boredom sets in, or keep out the sound of chanting students in neighbouring classes. The children sit on roughly cut benches and tables, which in the case of the Grade 1 students are much too high. In some classes two or three students share a table, while in the Grade 1 class sometimes five children squeeze in together.

At one end of the school building there is a locked room with four solid wooden walls, the only secure space in the school. This is the storeroom, the staffroom, and the Principal's office all in one. The room contains a jumble of desks with one at the end of the room set aside for the Principal. Textbooks are stored in unlabelled boxes stacked on benches. However, the class representatives who collect and deposit the textbooks before and after each lesson seem to have a storage system that works.

The key to the room was kept by the Principal, but after a few weeks Bounyang was also given a key so that he could access the textbooks when the Principal was absent. Apart from chalk, the main school resource was these precious textbooks. At the start of the year the school received an allocation from the DEB of 18 new books for each of the three main subjects for Grades 1 to 4. These supplemented the older, worn, textbooks which the school had received years before. There were no other books in the school although the Principal said he remembered someone coming and donating some picture books once but he thought they must have gone home with students and never been returned.

Poster-sized papers were pasted onto the rough wooden walls of the staffroom listing each teacher's qualification and work history, the school timetable, and basic school statistics. Smaller pieces of paper documented the teachers' yearly plans and the results of the monthly tests which are reported to the DEB. When asked why they were displayed like this, the Principal explained that it was *"in case the DEB comes to visit."*

The Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) – some of the men on the truck who I had met the first morning at the DEB - provided valuable support to the school. Monthly meetings were held with the Principal who informed the Committee of attendance patterns and other school issues. At the Principal's request, the VEDC arranged for villagers to help repair the school and the classroom furniture. The VEDC was also instrumental in supporting the two volunteer teachers through the collection of school fees and rice from each family. Three months after starting work, Bounyang received his first monthly payment of around 150,000 kip (US$18). He was also was given about 50 kg of rice twice a year. The Head of the VEDC explained the situation:

> *The DEB hasn't told us how long these teachers will be unpaid so we have to support them. They have told us that we need to observe and evaluate the new teachers and then report to the DEB, then later they will be given permanency*.
>
> Village Head: Visit 1. Interview 1

Such support by senior people in the village to establish and maintain the school may have been fostered as a result of their personal histories when schooling had often been disrupted due to the war. Bounyang's uncle explained how when he was young, anyone wanting to attend high school had a 10 km journey: *"Sometimes I walked and sometimes I went in an ox cart or on a bicycle. I left home at dawn and didn't return until late in the afternoon."* Apart from the government allocation of some textbooks, some blackboards and some chalk, and payment for only two of the four staff, there was no other external assistance. In these circumstances having the support of an effective VEDC made a great difference to the functioning of the school.

CR 1.5 The students

In 2009/10 the school had a total of 168 students officially enrolled. While most classes averaged around 30 students, Bounyang's Grade 1 class of 61 children was double the others because almost half of his students were repeating the year. About one third of the children in the school spoke *Lao* as their mother tongue and two thirds spoke a different ethnic language, *Laven*. However, Bounyang, who was born in the village, was the only teacher who spoke *Laven*. The Government's language policy in this area is clear – the 2007 Education Law stipulates that the oral and written language of instruction in primary schools must be *Lao* only. The majority of children in the school therefore have the massive challenge of learning to speak *Lao* (with no formal oral language lessons) while concurrently learning to read and write *Lao*. The official curriculum makes no allowance for the reality of this situation and all children are expected to progress at the same rate regardless of their competency in the language of instruction.

As there was no preschool in the village some parents sent children who were younger than the official age of six to school. Each day Bounyang had four or five extra children who were not enrolled but were allowed to sit in his class. While other teachers might have enforced the age limit, Bounyang was related to many of the families and explained how he wanted to *"get on with the villagers and not be seen to be turning their children away."*

As in most rural schools, student attendance fluctuated depending on the season. During times of planting and harvesting many of the older children were called away by their families to either help in the fields or to help look after younger siblings. During the cold season when there was little food available, many of the older boys chose to go hunting in what is left of the local forest, to supplement their families' food supplies.

CR 1.6 The staff

During the first week of my observational visits, as the Principal and I stood outside during one of the morning breaks, he explained how the previous year there had been three classes in the school, two of them multi-grade. Now this year, with an extra staff member, he would be able to organise the students into four separate classes - Grades 1, 2, and 3, and a combined Grade 4/5 class. At that point he recounted why he had driven to the DEB on the first day we met:

> *The Grade 2 teacher is going off on maternity leave. If Bounyang hadn't come to teach that would have left only two of us to teach the five classes, so getting him back was very important to us.*
>
> Principal: Visit 1. Interview 1

The Principal went on to talk about his staff. His most experienced teacher had taught in the school since she graduated 5 years earlier. The previous year she had taught a combined Grade 2/3 class. This year she would be responsible for Grade 3, but for three months, while the regular teacher for that class was on maternity leave, she would also teach the Grade 2 class. She was from a neighbouring village and travelled to school by motorbike each day.

The Grade 2 teacher had commenced work at the school as a volunteer teacher the year before. During the year she had met and married a local farmer. Now, at the start of the school year, she had gone on maternity leave. In her first year she taught Grade 1 which was considered the most difficult class to teach. However, because of the baby, the Principal decided that it would be best if she took the Grade 2 class, leaving the Grade 1 class for the newly arrived Bounyang. I met her for the first time in the second semester when she was back at school, her baby asleep in a hammock in her classroom while she taught.

All of the teachers at the school had graduated from the same one-year diploma course as Bounyang. This year the Grade 3 teacher was upgrading her qualification to a three-year diploma. She travelled to the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC) each weekend to attend a three-year part-time course, which she paid for herself. As part of the requirements for this course, she would undertake a practicum at the local high school for three weeks, leaving Bounyang to mind her class.

CR 1.7 The Principal

The Principal came from a district in the south of the province. He had been assigned to Sukumnoyi village and had worked in the school for ten years, the last three teaching the newly established Grade 4/5 class. Like all of the teachers the Principal supplemented his income by growing coffee. He had married into one of the relatively better-off families in the village and his wife's family owned several thousand coffee bushes. During planting and harvesting times he sometimes came to class for only a few minutes a day to write the lessons on the board and to instruct his students to copy from their text books. On other days he left it up to the rest of the teachers to set work for his class. Some afternoons he took his students to work in his plantation, and in recompense a small fee was paid to the school. Bounyang explained that the students never received payment as it was considered to be their *"labour contribution"* to the school.

CR 1.8 The village

A few days after I arrived for my first week-long visit, the Village Committee members invited me to a lunch. I was very pleased as this gave me the ideal opportunity to explain my research and also to gather village statistics. The Village Head gave a welcoming speech – he explained that the community was made up of 152 households with a total population of 954. All families were involved in the farming of coffee - either cattimore or arabica. Over the last five years, as transportation had improved, interest had developed in growing vegetables. Families who in the past had grown vegetables only for local consumption, were now growing them for sale in other parts of the country or were selling them to buyers from neighbouring Thailand. The village economy was improving – in 2008 the official statistics recorded a per capita income of around 3,800,000 kip (US$450).

Over the year, as I stayed in Bounyang's uncle's house, I learnt more about village life. Bounyang's uncle had been the Village Head for many years and liked to talk about the changes he had seen - the sealed road that linked the village to the neighbouring province, the supply of electricity, the availability of satellite television, and now, recently, access to a mobile phone network - these things had improved people's lives, especially those who could afford to pay for the services. However, with development came other problems such as the increased pressure on farmers to sell their land to outside investors. There were those in the village, he said, who had given in to the temptation of cash and were now able to sell only their labour. He was proud of his village and encouraged me to get out and meet people and see the seasonal farming practices and visit the local waterfall although I was always warned *"Don't stray off the track – there are bombies everywhere."* These were the unexploded ordnance from the cluster bombs which had been dropped all over the area during the "American War"[4]. Over the weeks spent living with Bounyang's relatives I saw how hard they all worked in order to make a living. Coffee and vegetable production started at dawn and often finished well after dark, particularly during the planting and harvesting seasons. At those times, days were intense and everybody had to pull their weight. Even Bounyang, with responsibility for a class of around 60 children, was still expected to help his family.

[4] Nearly forty years after the end of U.S. military intervention in Indo-China and the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Laos still grapples with the legacy of war. Between 1963 and 1974, the U.S. subjected Laos to a relentless bombing campaign along the supply line for North Vietnamese troops, the so-called the Ho Chin Minh trail. According to the Lao Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Program more bombs were dropped on Laos than were dropped on Japan and Germany during World War II. During half a million U.S. bombing missions, over two million tonnes of explosives were dropped on the country between those years. This included more than 266 million anti-personnel munitions, the hand-sized "*bombies*" disgorged from cluster bombs. It is estimated that 30 per cent of the ordnance dropped on Laos remains unexploded. (Sutton *et al.,* 2011)

CR 1.9 The first few weeks of teaching

Every morning during my visits I stood outside before school started and watched Bounyang organise his students. Except for Mondays when it was school assembly, the other teachers just let their students wander into class, but each day Bounyang had his class follow a strict routine. The children lined up in two rows, then Bounyang went along the lines checking to see whether they had washed their hands. Some days he brought a pair of nail clippers and students whose nails were too long had them clipped on the spot in what amounted to a public shaming. When he was satisfied that his students were neat enough, he allowed them to file into class. He acknowledged each child with a nod and required a nod in return. Boys were told to tuck their shirts in and girls to straighten their skirts. He then followed the children into class where they stood and greeted him in chorus: *"Sabaidi Bao Ku."*[5] Finally Bounyang called the roll asking why some children were absent.

On a typical day the students would arrive in class relaxed and chatting to their friends, but as soon as Bounyang called them to order, the atmosphere changed and the natural playfulness of these young children evaporated. Girls sat with girls, and boys with boys, while a group of older students, mostly boys who were repeating the year, sat at the back of the class. Irrespective of subject most lessons followed the same pattern - Bounyang would announce the number of the lesson then walk around the room to check that the students had their textbooks open at the right page. Students were then called to the board in ones or twos to read out a few letters or to recite some numbers listed in the textbook for that lesson. During these 'board activities' the rest of the class were told to *"sit and watch."* After a majority of the students had been up to the board, a procedure that could take half an hour, Bounyang would tell the class to copy the letters or the numbers from the board into their notebooks. While students were copying Bounyang would walk around the room showing individuals how to hold their pencil or patiently wait for others, encouraging them to copy a letter or two. However, without constant attention, many students lost concentration and the noise levels gradually increased until Bounyang would shout for everyone to put their hands on their heads so that order could be restored.

[5] "Good morning Uncle Teacher"

Bounyang worked hard at maintaining classroom discipline. His mother recalled how not long after he started he told her he wanted to hit some of the boys but she had cautioned him not to and to be patient. Bounyang later explained that although he had not resorted to hitting, he had shouted a lot at first and when all else failed he had threatened to leave:

> *That seemed to be the only thing that made them sit up and be quiet. I thought that the children here wouldn't respect me because they know me but I think they can see that I care about them and so they respect me. Even the naughty children who I have to reprimand still respect me. I have to be strict though otherwise they won't listen to me and do what I ask.*
>
> Bounyang: Visit 1. Interview 2

The impression that I had received in the first weeks when I spoke to Bounyang on the phone - that the job was not easy - was confirmed during the observational visits. During a conversation with Bounyang's mother she revealed that in the first few weeks of teaching her son had often returned home at night saying how difficult it was and how unprepared he felt even to teach them how to hold a pencil or to get them to pay attention in class.

CR 1.10 As the year progressed

After nine weeks of teaching, the Grade 3 teacher left to go on her three-week practicum. This meant that her class as well as the Grade 2 class she was minding became Bounyang's responsibility. The Principal was also frequently absent so that for much of this three-week period Bounyang, the unpaid beginning teacher, was responsible for the entire school and its 168 students. With an extraordinary degree of equanimity Bounyang explained the strategies he used to survive. Similar situations, though not as extreme, continued to happen throughout the year.

> *During this time it was important for me to train my students to get on with the work I set for them and to do it independently when I was not in the room. The easiest thing to do was to make them copy from the board or the textbook. I just went from classroom to classroom making sure they had something to copy.*
>
> Bounyang: Visit 3. Interview 2

With little knowledge about how to teach young children oracy, literacy or numeracy, and no one to talk to, Bounyang attempted a number of strategies which evolved into a 'try and see' process. However, in general, lessons were mostly taught in the traditional format of explaining at the board and then letting the students come out to read, write or do calculations. When questioned about this intense focus on the board, he reflected on his own learning experiences:

> *I can remember when I was at school, I was so shy and so I don't want these students to be like I was. When you get to high school if you don't go to the board, you don't get respect. It's not enough just to be able to read and write, they should also be able to do this in front of others.*
>
> Bounyang: Visit 2. Interview 2

During the four weeks I spent in Bounyang's classroom he demonstrated a high degree of personal discipline and commitment. Throughout the year he came to school on time and everyday tried his best to teach his students. He continued to enforce the classroom rituals which he had established for the children – lining up, putting hands up to answer questions, being quiet and listening to the teacher, copying down the lessons and setting homework. However, taking it in turns to come to the board and copying dominated the classroom life of his students.

In his journal and in discussion Bounyang continued to emphasise how he wanted all of his students to learn to read and write. However, the evidence suggests that although he worked extremely hard to teach his students, by the end of the year very few had achieved even the basics. Even so the parents recognised the pastoral care and patience he applied to his work. Seeing the progress of a handful of the students, mainly those who were repeating, and hearing their parents' comments had encouraged him:

> *Some parents told me that I was doing a good job. They said that they were happy as they could see their children were now starting to read and write. They told me that children who had been in* Grade *1 last year hadn't learnt much but now they were learning with me. When I heard this it made me feel really pleased.*
>
> Bounyang: Visit 4. Interview 1

CASE RECORD 2

MISS TIPUTAI

NONGSAVANH VILLAGE SCHOOL

Case Record 2: Miss Tiputai

From what I can see my daughter doing, I think teaching is harder than farming. With teaching you have to think about how to make students understand but with farming you just have to do it - you don't have to think about how to work with all those people.

Tiputai's Mother: Visit 1. Interview 1

CR 2.1 The first visit

I had last seen Tiputai at her graduation ceremony three months earlier. Over the intervening period she had been working with her parents planting rice, looking after buffalo, and helping with the harvest while waiting to be told where she was to teach. We had agreed that on my introductory visit to her village we would first meet at the Sukuma District Education Bureau (DEB) where she would pick up her letter of appointment and I would provide the DEB with my letters of authorisation. At the time I was based at the Pakse Teacher Training College (TTC), and when the Director heard that I was unfamiliar with the way to Sukuma he suggested that one of his new lecturers who came from the area, accompany me on the day trip to show me the way and to facilitate introductions. Sukuma was a district where I was not known, and as I was anxious about what sort of reception I would receive, I was very pleased to accept this offer of assistance.

So it was that on the second day of the new school year I drove out of Pakse and followed the southern road towards Cambodia for about 40km before turning off and crossing the Mekong on a very basic car ferry. As I manoeuvred my little car off the ferry and up the steep bank on the other side I was glad to have the company of and reassurances from my two colleagues – the new lecturer and my interpreter. Once over that hurdle, the rest of the 60 km drive took us through lush paddy fields punctuated every few kilometres by small villages.

When we arrived at the DEB, Tiputai was waiting. Earlier, in August, as instructed, she had gone to the office and lodged her graduation certificate. A few weeks later the Principal from her village informed her that she would be appointed to teach in his school. While Tiputai waited on the veranda for her letter, the Deputy Director invited me into his office. I presented my stamped credentials to him and outlined my research program, and in turn he explained how the Provincial Education Service (PES) had already notified him of my research. He then expanded on the number of teachers and schools in the district and informed

me that Tiputai was one of 11 new primary school teachers who were being deployed. Somewhat naively I enquired how many were permanent and was told *"None of them ... some of them will have to wait maybe three years for permanency."* The Deputy Director then confirmed that, should I wish, I would be able to stay in Tiputai's village, and with formalities over, I was free to continue.

With Tiputai leading the way on the family motorbike, her signed letter of appointment safely tucked into her bag, we travelled for a few kilometres back along the main dirt road which ran the length of the district, before veering off to the west towards Thailand. It was a slow 10km trip along a small uneven dirt road, navigating the water and the mud, before finally we arrived at Tiputai's village. As we drove through the village I could see that many people were out in the fields harvesting the rice crop that was the focus of their lives. We passed a *vat,* then Tiputai signalled for us to stop - here in front of us were her house and not far away, the school.

Our first visit was to the school where the staff were waiting for us. Classes had been cancelled so that the teachers could meet us while the students played outside. We were invited into the staffroom and I explained the purpose of my research. After my talk, received in silence, the Principal informed us that Tiputai would start teaching Grade 3 the following week. He assured us that we were very welcome and that he and his staff would assist us, as instructed by the 'higher authorities'. A tour of the school followed. In seven more weeks I would return to commence the first of the week-long observational visits.

CR 2.2 Family life

After visiting the school Tiputai took us to meet her family. The family home was a solid unpainted wooden structure, with a corrugated iron roof, which sat high off the ground on stilts, and was similar to most others in the village. Her parents had come from the fields to meet us, and over a lunch of sticky rice and fish soup they carefully introduced themselves. They told me how this was the first time a *falang* had lived in the village and that in order to allow me to stay in their house it had been necessary for them to receive permission from the Village Head. During a later visit, Tiputai's father confided how at first there had been gossip in the village about these arrangements and so he had told everyone that I was a relative:

> *You see my great grandfather was French. He married my great grandmother and they had one daughter, my grandmother. So I told them, "Look you can see my nose - it's different from yours, this falang is my relative and so I should let her stay here".*
>
> Tiputai's Father: Visit 1. Interview 1

This apparently quietened down the gossip which, he said, stemmed from the jealousy of those who thought only about the money a *falang* would bring.

Apart from Tiputai, her parents had only one other child, a younger son. He studied at the recently built lower secondary school, located about 2 km away, but if he wanted to continue on to upper secondary school next year, he would have to board in the district town. Such a small family was quite unusual in the village. That first day I also met Tiputai's uncle who had 11 children. In 1979 he had lost a leg when he went to fight for the Vietnamese against the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and as he could not farm his family's rice fields, he was dependent on his children for support.

One thing was obvious - just how hard people worked - regardless of the season work never seemed to stop for Tiputai's family. Rice was the main source of food and income, but other crops such as corn, eggplant, cucumber, chilli and garlic were grown in the dry season along the banks of the small river near the village and sold in local markets. One morning Tiputai's mother returned from the district market and showed me 40,000 kip (US$5) which she had earned from the sale of a whole crop of cucumbers. With this money she would buy soap powder, salt, and chewing tobacco and save the rest. Building and repairs to the house and fences were done outside of the planting and harvesting seasons. During the 'quiet' times,

bamboo shoots were preserved and handicrafts made from rattan and kapok. These items were either sold in the district town or at village fairs. Occasionally, paid work was offered to the men of the village to pick forest foods which were bought by Chinese and Vietnamese traders. A variety of foods were gathered from the small pockets of forest and scrub nearby, and tiny fish were caught in the paddy fields and ditches. All of these activities contributed to the family being able to support itself and have a basic standard of living.

CR 2.3 Becoming a teacher

It was well known in the village that Tiputai had been one of the best students in her grade. The Principal and the four older teachers still remembered how studious she had been when she was a student at primary school which she had left only seven years before. She also excelled at the Teachers' College and received the award for the best student in her course at the College graduation ceremony. Now, back in her village, she presented as confident with the other teachers and was not shy to talk and gossip with them.

Neither of Tiputai's parents had completed primary school. Her mother's memory of school was that "*In my first year I was frightened of the teacher so I never went back again"*. They had sent Tiputai to school so that she could learn to read and write but they had not expected her to become a government worker. Her mother recalled that a fortune-teller had once told her *"Your daughter is destined to live as a farmer"* and then recounted the struggle she had when trying to decide if she should allow Tiputai to continue her studies:

When she finished primary school I thought she should stop studying, I didn't think it was right that a girl should move away from home to go to secondary school - you see the only secondary school at that time was in the town about 12km away. But she cried and cried every night until finally I promised to go to the town to see if there was someone we could find who she could board with. Although we couldn't really afford it, I knew she wanted to study so much and so I eventually gave in.

Tiputai's Mother: Visit 4. Interview 3

After spending six years at secondary school, Tiputai wanted to become a policewoman, but this time her mother decided it was too dangerous a job for her daughter. Somewhat reluctantly Tiputai agreed and decided instead to apply to become a teacher. It was, she said, "*better than doing nothing and working back in the fields."* She obtained a 'quota position' from the DEB, which meant she would obtain a government scholarship. However, Tiputai still needed support from her family to study in the provincial town:

My mother sold her prized buffalo so she could afford to send me. From finishing high school to arriving at the college, it cost her about 3,000,000 kip. Then she sent me about 40,000 kip a month to live on - enough to buy soap and some extra food. At that time I had only one 'sinh' and one other set of clothes. And I was able to return back home only in the mid-year break.

Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 3

After Tiputai started work as a volunteer teacher, the next goal was to become a permanent teacher. The first step in the process was to gain permission from the DEB simply to apply, so to further this end a small gift and some of her family's newly harvested rice were donated to the DEB. Positive reports about her work sent in by the school Principal also helped her cause. Three months after starting work Tiputai was notified that she would be able to apply to become permanent and after the paper work was processed in the second semester she was told that she would be made permanent the following year. For the first year though, she could only dream of how she would use a monthly salary of 350,000 kip (US$43): *"I'll give about 100,000 kip to each of my parents, 50,000 kip to my brother and keep 100,000 for myself."* While teachers' salaries are set at standard rates across the country, the actual amount received is sometimes less than expected. During one visit, some of the permanent teachers complained that there had been a compulsory deduction from their salary.

The Government, which was hosting the SEA games[6] for the first time, had instructed all government workers to purchase a 50,000 kip lottery ticket to support its funding of the games, and the DEB had obliged on their behalf. Teachers confirmed that now and again their monthly salaries were less than anticipated due to such 'voluntary' contributions.

CR 2.4 The school

There had been a school in the village since 1975. The Principal, who arrived as a beginning teacher in 1977, recounted how the school had originally been next to the village *vat*. However, in 1991 the Village Committee dismantled the building and reconstructed it on the southern side of the village where there was more room for the children to play. This termite-infested wooden structure now stands in sharp contrast next to a solid concrete building erected in 2003 using surplus cement, bricks and roofing from a neighbouring school construction project. The villagers themselves provided the labour to construct the school. A thin bamboo fence around the perimeter acted more to define the school boundary than as a structure to keep animals out and was regularly repaired by students and teachers during the Wednesday afternoon sessions set aside for 'labour'.

[6] The 25th South East Asian (SEA) Games were held in Vientiane 9 - 18 December 2009.

The old wooden building had no internal walls but housed four classes – two Grade 2 and two Grade 4 classes – about 140 children in the one space. In the concrete building two Grade 5 classes each had a room at either ends of the building. However, the central section of the building was also a long hall without any internal walls. It was here that Tiputai taught her Grade 3 class sharing the hall with two Grade 1 classes, both taught by their own experienced teacher. The organisation of the school in this way meant that eight teachers each had classes of around 33 students each while Tiputai, the beginning teacher, had a class of 70 which was more than double the size of all others.

On each of the four observational visits I made to the school my first stop was always the staff room, which, unlike the rest of the school, had lockable windows and a lockable door. It was the one area in the school that reflected the organization of nine female teachers who kept it clean and tidy. Each teacher had her own wooden desk and a plastic chair, and with the desks arranged in a semi-circle so that the teachers sat facing each other, they could chat and work at the same time. Six wooden benches served as a long table along one side of the room and were used for meetings and for sharing snacks of papaya salad or fried insects. Three coloured posters were positioned high up on the end wall out of the reach of the children, one bearing the faces of the leaders in the government, another of Kaysone Phomvihane, the founding father of Laos, and the third, an entwined portrait of Karl Marx and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Large sheets of paper were also pasted up which showed the qualifications and length of service of each teacher - both the ten teachers in the central school and the two teachers in the satellite school 3km away. Enrolment numbers for the year, disaggregated by gender, were also on display. During school hours the window shutters in the staffroom were thrown open to catch the cross breeze. It was a comfortable place for teachers to sit and provided a view of the grounds where students played during breaks.

Except for tables, benches and a few rudimentary blackboards, the classrooms were virtually bare. There were a few wall-charts, but no displays of work, no clocks, no teaching aids. However, the school had a limited supply of textbooks and these were kept in labelled boxes on roughly made shelves in the corner of the staff room. With two or three students sharing one book there were enough textbooks for each of the three main subjects of Mathematics, Lao Language and World Around Us. However, for the other primary school subjects there were only enough textbooks for the teachers to use as reference books. A wooden box of old storybooks, donated by an NGO, was kept by the door inside the staff room, and students were allowed to borrow these to read outside during the morning break.

The only other resource in the school was the UNICEF Blue Box[7] which provided teaching aids for use in health and hygiene lessons.

CR 2.5 The students

The statistics listed on the staffroom wall showed that the central school had an enrolment of 339 students, 189 of them female, and that the satellite school had 82 students with 40 of them being female. The Principal explained that the class organisation changed each year depending on how many teachers were allocated to the school. The school, he said, was *"luckier than in previous years"* as there were enough teachers for all the classes, except for Grade 3, to have a *"reasonable"* number of students – around 30 to 35 per class. The Principal also spoke of other challenges the teachers faced:

> *All the students in the school speak Lao at home, which makes teaching the younger grades a bit easier. However, many students come from homes where one or both parents are illiterate and this makes teaching Lao literacy more difficult.*
>
> Principal: Visit 1. Interview 1

[7] The UNICEF Blue Box is a health and hygiene resource kit that has been distributed to some primary schools in Laos.

All students in the school are charged an annual fee of 8,000 kip (US$1) which is kept by the school to pay for administration costs. As well as this one-off payment for fees, parents are regularly called upon to support the school with donations of items such as food and drinking water for visitors attending meetings; tools, nails and bamboo for repairing the fence on 'labour' afternoons; buffalo and cow manure for the flower garden; and saplings for planting in the school yard. During the year the DEB had instructed the school to build some shade huts in the playground and grass for thatching the roofs was brought by the students.

CR 2.6 The staff

All of the nine teaching staff at the central school were women. The eldest teacher, who graduated in 1987, taught the Grade 1 class. She was also the Deputy Principal and increasingly throughout the year, as the Principal's chronic illness took hold, was called on to take over the running of the school. Two of the other experienced staff graduated in the early 1990s after completing a three-year certificate course. One, the daughter-in-law of the Village Head, taught a Grade 5 class, and by the end of the year she has been appointed by the DEB to be the Acting Principal. The other experienced teacher took the Grade 1 class. The remaining teachers all graduated within the last four years from the same one-year diploma course which Tiputai had just completed. For Tiputai the staff formed a close-knit group as she was related to four of them as well as to the Principal. Only two of the nine teachers were from other villages and they were hoping for transfers back to their home village. Most of the teachers at the school were teaching the same grade they had taught the previous year. While the Principal had offered Tiputai one of the Grade 5 classes, she explained that she had not felt comfortable taking that class as she knew one of the other more experienced teachers wanted to take it and no one wanted the large Grade 3 class. During one of our many discussions she rationalised her situation:

> *It worked out best in the end as that teacher has been really friendly and helped me a lot. I suppose she knew that I had been offered a Grade 5 class by the Principal but that I had turned it down and saved her from having to take on a new grade which she wouldn't have had any lesson plans for, not to mention saving her from having to teach such a big class.*
>
> Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 2

CR 2.7 The Principal

The Principal was well known in the neighbouring villages and by the DEB. He had arrived in the district 35 years before as a new graduate from the Teachers' College. He recalled how he had arrived on a truck with 27 other teachers and was let off in this village:

> *At that time there was nothing here - just a few houses and lots of mud and buffaloes. I remember thinking at the time, if I had known how to leave I would have. It was July and as soon as I arrived I had to start planting rice - but the problem was I didn't know how, you see I am not from here, I am from another province where we didn't grow rice and due to the war I had to leave that place. So some villagers here showed me how to plant and I planted my first rice crop. After a couple of months I harvested it and at the same time I started to teach.*
>
> Principal: Visit 1. Interview 1

He had married a local woman and stayed on teaching until 1998 when his position was made 'non-teaching'. However, some years, when there were not enough teachers, he still helped the others to teach large classes. Over the last few years, a time when there had been enough teachers, he had just done administrative work and managed the reporting to the DEB.

Tiputai spoke highly of the Principal. He had been one of her teachers when she was in school herself. When she left secondary school he had gone to the DEB to help her get a government scholarship to study, and when she had graduated he had lobbied the DEB so she could return to her home village to teach. For the first few weeks of the year he had helped her, watching some of her teaching and giving her some advice. However, after the first few weeks his illness became considerably worse and he had to stay home much of the time.

CR 2.8 The village

Nongsavanh Village is built on the fertile flood plains of the Mekong River. Narrow dirt roads, dusty and rutted during the dry season and almost impassable during the wet season, connect it to neighbouring villages and to the district town. The villagers are rice farmers who rely on crops and the raising of animals for their livelihoods. Being farmers also makes them dependent on the weather. At the beginning of the school year, when typhoon Ketsana[8] hit the village, it destroyed half the rice crop.

[8] Typhoon Ketsana formed on 23 September 2009 and dissipated on 30 September. It was classified as a Category 2 cyclone and resulted in 747 deaths across SE Asia and caused an estimated US$1.09 billion in damages. In southern Laos the typhoon caused wide-spread damage to homes and villages and devastated the rice crop. At least 16 people were killed. 23 schools were destroyed and 136 schools affected. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhoon_Ketsana

The school opening ceremony was the one annual event when the villagers and school staff formally came together. Due to the Principal's ill health the 2009/2010 ceremony was postponed until week eight of the term and coincided with my first observational visit. It was a large event and preparations had taken several days. Duties were assigned by the Deputy Principal - writing out invitations, being responsible for organising students to clean the school, arranging the hall, and organising the food. Teachers had instructed the students in the first four grades to each bring five crickets, some frogs if possible, and some vegetables. The Grade 5 students were responsible for supplying sticky rice and drinking water. Tiputai had been asked to write slogans to display in the large room in the concrete building where the ceremony would be held. Her exhortations, *"Work for Harmony"*, *"Study Hard, Work Hard, Be Brave"* and *"Don't Do Things Just for Praise",* were pasted on the front wall behind the seats where the most important guests sat.

The meeting was attended by the Village Head and representatives from each of the 15 work-groups into which the village was divided - roughly 18 households per work-group. All the teachers and four staff from the DEB, including the Deputy Director, also attended. After an hour-long report from the Deputy Principal about school progress and this year's plans, the Village Head and the Deputy Director of the DEB were invited to talk.

The Village Head thanked the teachers for their work and read out the official village statistics: *"Population - 1,870; families - 319; households - 266."* He also indicated that a high percentage of the village population was *"young - around 40%",* and the implications this had for education. What he did not mention was the large number of villagers who leave to find work in Thailand on construction sites, in hospitality and in factories. From later conversations I learnt how the remittances from these migrant workers were changing the village.[9] With additional money more substantial houses were being built, and gradually more people were purchasing equipment and appliances, such as electric water pumps and televisions, which could now be run as the village had been connected to the electricity grid three years earlier. The Deputy Director of the DEB then took the stage and used the opportunity to urge the Village Committee and villagers to support the school:

9 Sarausad (2011) has shown that: *"Intra-regional migration enhances individual migrants' economic position by allowing them to earn more than what they could back home, despite the fact that the wages received by migrants from Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar in Thailand are below or barely meet the minimum standards"* (p. 3).

The government has some funds but the villagers need to participate and support the school. The DEB now is trying to find some funds. This year we have written 14 applications to the PES to get funds to build more schools but we don't know yet if we can get support for your village. We would like the village to build some furniture and also to support the new teachers with rice and a small salary.

Deputy Director, DEB: Visit 1. Journal Notes

After the Deputy Director's speech, some of the heads of the work-groups complained that they found it hard to get the villagers in their group to make their quota of benches and tables for the school. Some said their members were too busy farming. When no solution to this problem was offered by the work-group leaders or the official speakers, the Village Head diplomatically ended the discussion saying the topic would be brought up at the next village meeting. By the end of the year, neither additional benches nor tables had been provided by the village, although some teachers explained that it was because the Principal was sick and was unable to push the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) for support. A couple of the older teachers agreed it had been better in the past when the Principal had been well and there had been a different, more experienced, Village Head. Tiputai concurred:

When the Acting Principal takes over she will be able to work with her father-in-law, the Village Head. Then there will be some changes. I might get a wall for my classroom and a door and windows.

Tiputai: Visit 3. Interview 3

CR 2.9 The first few weeks of teaching

By the time of the first observational visit, eight weeks into the semester, Tiputai had been teaching for six of them. She had already conducted two monthly tests and was familiar with sending her monthly reports to the Deputy Principal who collated the results and sent them to the DEB. Tiputai explained that it wasn't until week two that she had started teaching, and then another of the weeks had revolved around the National Teacher's Day celebrations at the school as well as one day spent at the DEB office participating in their celebrations. Although no one in the DEB had taken the opportunity to talk to her about her new job, she was pleased that she had managed to get to know some of them.

By the time of my first observational visit it was apparent that Tiputai already had good control of her large class. She addressed each of her 70 students by name, and used humour and questioning to keep them interested. A lesson typically involved giving explanations at the board, then setting the students exercises to complete as she moved around the room, interacting with individuals, and encouraging them to complete their work. Although the room was crowded, with some students sitting five to a bench, she directed questions to all the students and not just to those seated up the front. When she asked students to listen or come to the board, they did so. Perhaps the presence of two other teachers working in the same hall who were not averse to thumping a table or twisting an ear when noise became a problem, acted as a calming influence. However, it was Tiputai's firm but friendly manner that appeared to be the major reason why her students paid attention.

The main concern Tiputai voiced during my first visit was how to help her students learn. There were a range of abilities in the class, and she was already worried about whether she would be able to teach all the students in her class to read. There were several students who could not read anything at all and about half the class who could read only a little. However, all these students had 'passed' the Grade 2 exams and been promoted to Grade 3.

After the Deputy Principal had reported at the school opening ceremony that only six students had needed to repeat Grade 2, Tiputai privately queried why others had not repeated when *"they don't seem to be able to do much either*."

During the first visit Tiputai used word cards to teach reading and attempted group work in one mathematics lesson. This, she said, was her third time to use group work but she acknowledged that it was quite difficult because of the class size. In another lesson she used a role-play to teach hygiene. She explained that she had got the idea for the lesson from the UNICEF Blue Box kept in the staff room but that next time she might let the students practice more before they performed for the class. At the end of the visit, when asked what she felt she had learnt so far about teaching, Tiputai replied:

> *I have learnt that rather than just making the students sit and listen to me talking, it might be better to get the students to do activities and exercises so that they are doing something. That way they might learn more than just through listening.*
>
> Tiputai: Visit 1. Interview 1

CR 2.10 As the year progressed

By my second observational visit, Tiputai had spent just on three months trying to work out how to teach 70 students. What was immediately noticeable was the change in her attitude, since my first visit, towards her work. Previously she had been full of enthusiasm for the task, but now, when asked how it had been going, she replied with considerable frankness:

> *It's not as difficult as before – now I just let them copy down and I don't even have to write out the lesson plans because the Principal is sick and not here and the Deputy is often away buying up rice.*
>
> Tiputai: Visit 2. Interview 1

Shortly after the second month of term, one of the Grade 1 teachers who taught in the same room as Tiputai, started to give her advice. After observing a couple of Tiputai's attempts to use group work in lessons, she advised her *"don't bother – it is too hard with so many students."* Tiputai recalled how she had readily agreed with her and had stopped. She had also stopped using the word cards for teaching reading units as it was *"easier to just write the words on the board."* Her major concern was now how to get through all the suggested activities in each lesson, and when she raised this in the staffroom with several teachers she was advised *"if you don't have enough time just cut out some of the activities."*

Throughout the next three visits I observed Tiputai attempting to find ways to survive and 'get through' the textbooks by the end of the year. She confided that if she had had her way, only half of the textbook units would have been completed by then. In addition to the difficulties of teaching her own class, she was also expected to set work for the Grade 1 students when their teachers were absent. Tiputai observed other teachers in the school often coming late and explained how they often just copied lessons onto the board and then withdrew to the staffroom to rest, or sat at their desks. During my last visit, Tiputai talked openly about her teaching frustrations:

> *I feel sad that I haven't taught more children to read – and feel disappointed that it's just so hard to teach my class. There's no one who is really interested in talking about teaching with me and how I can help my students learn.*
>
> Tiputai: Visit 4. Interview 2

By the end of the year, Tiputai had all but given up trying to teach using the methods she had learnt about in College and which she had started off with: *"There's not much incentive to work hard – just to work like the others and to fit in. If I did what I think I should be doing they would think that I was strange."* During the week before the final exams Tiputai said she hoped that next year she might be able to teach Grade 5. I asked her what would help her the most with her teaching and she replied, *"fewer students and a space of my own."*

CASE RECORD 3

MR KHAMXING

NAKASAN VILLAGE SCHOOL

Case Record 3: Mr Khamxing

Teaching is difficult, not because of me but because of the students. Sometimes I organise a good lesson but I can't finish it because the students don't understand and there is not enough time to teach them. The students make it hard, but I am pleased when I hear my name on the community loudspeakers telling the students to come to school because I am going to teach them to dance.

Khamxing: Visit 1. Interview 1

CR 3.1 The first visit

On the third day of the new school year I left Pakse and, as I had done two days before when I visited Mr Bounyang, headed up the road towards Paksong. However, 20 km out of town I turned off the main highway and headed north along a sealed road that skirts around the base of the Bolaven Plateau and goes on through to Salavanh, the capital of the next province. This time my destination was the Bachiang District Education Bureau (DEB) where I was to submit the letters approving my research. I was known at the DEB and the meeting proved to be a formality – in the space of a few minutes I was welcomed, promised cooperation and farewelled. And so I continued on my way for another 40 km to Nakasan village where Khamxing was waiting for me at the school. The school, however, turned out to be closed for the day, even though it was only the third day of the new school year. As Khamxing took me through the village to his house he explained that this was because it was also the beginning of the last month of Buddhist Lent and *"people are busy"*. The public speaker system in the *vat* blared out an announcement urging the villagers to come and help get ready for the ceremony and this appeared to be having an effect - 30 or more people were working in the grounds of the *vat*, some sweeping the yard, others preparing food, a few men constructing a long model boat made out of bamboo and banana palm - a *Lai Heua Fai*[10] - or fire-boat. That night it would be decorated with candles and offerings made to Lord Buddha.

In the village the smell of roasting coffee beans was all-pervasive. Goats, pigs and chickens ran around freely; fruit trees - pomelo, jack fruit, custard apple and tamarind - provided scattered shade for the coffee bushes and vegetable plots in adjacent gardens; and the coffee beans drying in the sun on blue plastic tarpaulins were protected from the animals by make-shift bamboo fences. A few people were working, but a festive atmosphere was

[10] The *Lai Heua Fai* festival involves families launching small candle-bearing rafts onto a river or stream to carry away defilements. Wishes and hopes for the year ahead are also sought. See Stuart-Fox & Mixay (2010) for a detailed account of Lao festivals and religious ceremonies.

clearly discernible throughout the village. Groups of men sat drinking in the shade, and as we passed one house Khamxing pointed out the man with the raucous laughter as the Principal. At that point I decided that a change of plans might be a good idea, and that introductions to the school staff could wait until my next visit.

CR 3.2 Family life

Khamxing's family home, like most houses in the village, was very simple. It was elevated several feet off the ground on wooden stilts that provided a space underneath for storage, animal shelter, and relaxation. The walls were made of split bamboo, woven into panels, and suspended between wooden framing, and the roof was made of thatched grass. Only a few of the more prosperous families – the Village Head, a man from the DEB, a few successful coffee growers - had houses with walls made of wood. Khamxing ushered me up a bamboo ladder to where, upstairs, mats had been rolled out. One by one, family members came up the ladder to see the *falang* and listen to why she wanted to work with Khamxing. After I explained the purpose of my research the parents introduced their family. They had five children of whom Khamxing was the eldest. Their second son, a few years younger than Khamxing, was studying at the ethnic minority secondary boarding school in Pakse. Although his father was *Lao*, the son qualified for this special school as his mother was from the *Suai* ethnic group. Their third child, a girl, finished primary school a few years earlier and stayed at home, as according to her father *"she is needed to help with the farming and other chores"*. The two younger daughters were still in primary school and Khamxing's mother proudly announced that the youngest daughter, in Grade 3, would be taught by her own brother.

The talk came around to how expensive it had been to send Khamxing to train as a teacher. His mother explained that they had been able to help their son study at the college only because they knew that it was a one-year course: *"If it had been any longer we would have had to tell him to come home."* His father then appealed to me to help Khamxing gain permanency as soon as possible. He talked about how the coffee harvest had not been good because the rains were late: *"Our family needs the money and if possible we want our son to get a permanent job as soon as possible so that the government will give him a regular salary."* Even though the salary for a first year permanent teacher was not high, it would be paid regularly, even if a bit late.

Their need was real enough - the family had a plot of land where they grew coffee, sweet potatoes and peanuts, but they were not well off. That year they had grown 2.8 tonnes of peanuts, which, sold unshelled at 1,200 kip per kilogram, had brought in 3,360,000 kip (US$410). This was a better price than they got from the itinerant buyers for sweet potatoes, which had been sold for only 200 kip per kilogram, although the market price in Pakse was around 3,000 kip per kilogram. In this village any sweet potatoes that were not sold to the buyers were given to the pigs as the villagers had no way of getting the crop to the markets in Pakse or Salavanh.

That day I also met Khamxing's uncle and aunt who lived next door. His uncle worked in the Bachiang DEB and Khamxing's cousin, who graduated as a teacher two years before, had been made permanent after one year. Khamxing's father told me, *"I have heard that it used to cost quite a bit to become a permanent teacher, but now I don't know. The price might have gone up by now."* After requests from both the father and uncle, I explained that I had no influence to move his son's application on any faster; however, it was a message that I had to repeat several times over the next few months before the requests stopped.

CR 3.3 Becoming a teacher

At our first meeting, Khamxing's father explained how over 20 years ago he had come to the village as a teacher. After surviving for a few years on the rations which teachers received at that time in lieu of wages, he married a local woman and resigned from teaching to grow coffee. When I asked Khamxing whether he thought his father's earlier occupation had influenced his own decision to become a teacher, he replied:

Not really - but I suppose my parents wanted me to be a teacher so I agreed. When I finished secondary school, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. And then my uncle helped me to gain a government scholarship and so that's when I had the chance to go to Pakse to study. It wasn't until I started the course that I realised it was quite interesting and that the study wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be. I actually think it's been a good thing for me to do.

Khamxing: Visit 1. Interview 1

Although he had obtained a government scholarship which covered his college fees, some food and accommodation, his mother explained how he still needed money to buy some personal items: *"When we could, we sent him some money each month - sometimes 40,000 kip, sometimes 70,000 kip - whatever we could afford. I used the money we made from the coffee harvest to support him."* The family seemed pleased that Khamxing had been assigned back to his home village, especially his mother: "*Now we won't have to give him money to travel to work and he will be able to continue to help us in the fields."* After school and on the weekends Khamxing worked with his parents. Later in the year he explained that when he was working in the fields a lot, it was hard to find time to prepare lessons at home - only when farming was quiet was there enough time to make some teaching aids and prepare his lessons.

CR 3.4 The school

The school where Khamxing taught was a complete school and at the centre of the cluster which included two small satellite schools a few kilometres further off along a rough track. The central school building was a long, narrow, unfinished hall, with six spaces for six classes. In May 2009, just before the start of my visits, the Village Committee decided after years of complaints, to build a new school. To get the funds, the rights to a local fishpond were sold to the neighbouring village for 20,000,000 kip (US$2,500) and building materials and tools were purchased. During the end-of-year break, timber framing, one-metre high brick walls, and a corrugated iron roof were erected and for the first few weeks of the new academic year this was 'school' for the students. Then towards the middle of first semester classes were cancelled for two weeks and three external walls were hammered into place. However, the village by then had run out of money and so school recommenced without a wall along one side of the building and with no internal walls. Several months later the village received a small donation and the fourth wall was built. As there were still no internal walls, six blackboards from the old building were attached to the vertical roof pillars to divide off the classroom spaces.

Throughout the year, the Principal and the Village Head lobbied me to help them access funds to complete the school. They had heard about projects helping other schools in the district but the DEB had not introduced any to their village. With a little help the Village Committee put together a modest request to the Australian Direct Aid Program for funds to

build the six internal walls, a toilet and a well; however, at the end of 2010 they were told that their application had been unsuccessful.[11]

A small thatched hut, raised off the ground on short stilts, was located next to the new building and served multiple purposes - it was the staffroom and the Principal's office, and the back-half, which was lockable, contained a storeroom and a bedroom where the volunteer teacher who taught Grade 1 slept and lived. The school's supply of textbooks, and a few resources provided by UNICEF, were kept in the storeroom. As all teaching centred around textbooks, they were precious items, and not easily replaced. However, the Principal, whether in the interest of promoting literacy or for pecuniary reasons, had introduced a system that allowed students to rent Lao Language textbooks for 1,000 kip a year, although not all students took up the offer.

Various other levies were also made by the school – students in the first four grades were charged 5,000 kip a year for fees, while students in the fifth grade were charged 15,000 kip a year, this higher amount being for their 'learning result books' and to cover the cost of the end of year exams. Another 1,000 kip a month was collected from each student to support the volunteer teachers. The Principal explained how the school needed approval from the Village Committee when they wanted to collect monies from the parents and he had delegated the responsibility for such matters to his Deputy Principal.

An annual event, the National Teachers' Day ceremony[12], coincided with my first observational visit. The Principal advised me that at his school the occasion was traditionally celebrated over a *"couple of days"* - a local school ceremony, then a larger cluster ceremony at a neighbouring school, and then the national holiday - and that the school would be closed for three days. On the first day, at the school ceremony, each child brought a small gift and lined-up to give their presents to their classroom teacher. The main items were packets of soap powder and cakes of soap but some students also brought small bags of rice or some flowers. The Principal had decided that the main ceremony, on the second day, would be held

[11] The Direct Aid Program (DAP) is a small-scale grants program administered by the Australian Embassy in Vientiane. The purpose is to support projects that address basic humanitarian hardship and reduce poverty. Total funding per project should not exceed AU$30,000.

[12] Teachers' Day has been celebrated nationally since 7 October 1994. On the day students listen to speeches exhorting them to show respect for their teachers and then students present their teachers with flowers and small gifts. Ostensibly the day is in honour of Mr Kham, one of the first Lao teachers to work in the French school system, and an account of his life is told in speeches across the country. In 1905 there were only two schools in the country, one in Luang Prabang and the other in Vientiane. Mr. Kham started teaching at the Buddhist Monk Teachers' Training Institute at Vat Chanh in 1907 and in 1913 he began working at Tafforin School in Vientiane. In November 1920, Mr. Kham led a nationalist movement in Vientiane against the French colonists. He was arrested and jailed but managed to escape and fled to Thailand where he died in 1949. (Lao Voices, 2009)

in the smaller satellite school, located three kilometres away, and I was invited to attend. The Heads from each of the three villages were present, along with representatives from the local mass organizations - the Lao Women's Union, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union, and the Lao Front for National Construction. In total, about 25 official guests were in attendance, six of them women. The DEB had sent staff to give out teachers' awards and to give weight to the speeches. On the morning of the ceremony the Principal told Khamxing that he was to speak and handed him an old carbon copy of the speech, delivered annually, in praise of teachers, and told him to practice. After the speech, the DEB representative stood up to give out teachers' certificates. The Principal and Deputy Principal then both received awards from the Provincial Education Service for their service and model teaching performance. Everyone clapped and after a few more speeches, games were organised for the students who had been sitting patiently in the hot sun. That afternoon I spoke to Khamxing, asking him how he was enjoying the job. He replied:

> *I like the respect that the job brings me and the way the villagers acknowledge the work I am doing. I know I've just started but when I received an award for my work from the Village Youth Union last week, it made me feel really good.*
>
> Khamxing: Visit 2. Interview 2

CR 3.5 The students

Because the new school building had no internal walls the 198 enrolled students sat in the one long hall divided up only by blackboards. This arrangement made teaching difficult and at times extremely noisy. All the teachers were under pressure to keep their own class quiet, although choral reading and reciting aloud were two activities which were considered an essential part of the daily teaching performance, and therefore permissible.

At the central school, all students spoke and understood *Lao*, although some were from families where one or both parents were *Suai* and these students spoke their own language at home. Many parents had only basic literacy skills while others were illiterate. Although some students came from families who could afford new school uniforms and notebooks, many students, particularly those in preschool and Grade 1, inherited uniforms and notebooks from older siblings. Poor student attendance was considered a problem by all the teachers, and Khamxing explained why he thought there were many absences. It was the same as when he was at school:

> *At certain times of the year some of the children, especially the younger ones, come to school hungry as their families cannot find food for them before they go to school. It affects them in the morning because they haven't eaten and during the mid-morning break they often go back home to find food and then sometimes they don't come back. During the dry season it is easier to hunt lizards and crickets so some students don't go to school at all and then it is difficult when they do because they have fallen behind and can't catch up. It is also hard when it's harvesting or planting time. Only a few students go to school and sometimes the school is closed.*
>
> Khamxing: Visit 3. Interview 2

In May 2010 the school closed for a few days when an early rain sent everyone to their fields to plant peanuts. Earlier in the year the coffee crop had failed and so families knew that they would only have their crop of peanuts to rely on for their cash income. In such circumstances it is understandable why schooling takes second place.

CR 3.6 The staff

A total of eight staff worked in the three schools in the cluster. Five staff were based at the central school while three others taught in the satellite schools. At one satellite school two teachers taught 102 students in five grades; at the other, the sole teacher taught 33 students in four separate grades. The staff at the central school were the non-teaching Principal, the Grade 4/5 teacher, Khamxing who taught Grade 3, the Grade 2 teacher who was Khamxing's cousin and who was also responsible for the preschool class, and the Grade 1 teacher who was in his third year of teaching but who came from another district and was still waiting to be made permanent. While he waited he rented some land from a Vietnamese rubber plantation company and for two years had grown peanuts. This helped supplement the financial support which the Principal had arranged, but which he received irregularly from the parents.

The two young teachers, a man and a woman, who taught Grades 1 and 2 respectively, had, two years earlier, both graduated from the same one-year course as Khamxing. The woman who taught Grades 4 and 5 had worked at the school for 7 years. She had started off untrained and then after two years of teaching attended the Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP)[13] course which was held in the school holidays over a two-year period. This course provided her with the equivalent of a one-year qualification and after graduation she was promoted to Deputy Principal. She also held the position of Academic Teacher and was considered by Khamxing as the most knowledgeable teacher at the school. For the last three years she had taught Grades 4 and 5 as a single multigrade class.

CR 3.7 The Principal

The Principal had graduated from a three-year diploma course 20 years before. Eight years previously he had arrived in Bachiang from another district and had subsequently married into a local family. After teaching a Grade 3/4 multigrade class for two years, he was promoted to Principal and as such had no teaching duties but was responsible for managing the main school and the two satellite schools. This involved collecting monthly statistics from all the teachers, reporting these to the DEB, and meeting with local community members in the three villages as necessary. As well as running the school he was also involved in farming coffee, peanuts and other crops.

13 See Appendix 2 for details of the Teacher Upgrading Program.

When Khamxing had been a student in Grade 4, the Principal had been his teacher. Now, as his Principal, he encouraged him to complete the many tasks required at the beginning of the school year. He had also warned Khamxing not to listen to village gossip about how teachers did not use the school fees appropriately. This, he told him, *"was just gossip and not to be believed"*. While Khamxing acknowledged that the Principal was *"friendly",* he also commented during several interviews, that the Principal spent a lot of time in his fields. Even so, the Principal had been presented with an award on Teacher's Day for his work, and his school had been awarded a Model Village School Award during the village ceremonies.

During Visit 3 I asked the Principal to explain the criteria which a school had to meet in order to secure the title of "Model Village School". The first criterion was that *"the principal should encourage harmony and good relations within the school and between local schools";* the second that *"the principal needed to encourage the villages to contribute to the school"*. While the Principal was in a non-teaching position and appeared to have plenty of time to visit the two satellite schools, he appeared to do little to ensure that the volunteer teachers were financially supported on a regular basis. The Deputy Principal, who was responsible for collecting the student's fees, distributed the funds according to the directives of the Principal. Over the first few months of the year the money from fees was used to pay for the school celebrations - Teachers' Day and the Model Village Award ceremonies. It was not until the end of the first semester that the Deputy Principal was told to pay 70,000 kip ($US8.50) from the school fund to the volunteer teacher who taught Grade 1. Another payment was made in the second semester – a total of 140,000 kip ($US17.00) for a year of teaching. According to an earlier agreement with the Village Committee, the volunteer teacher, who had no relatives in the village, would also receive one kilogram of rice per month from each of the families with children at the school, but it was the responsibility of all the teachers to collect this rice from their students. Many families, however, gave less than this amount, and without the active support of the Principal, the Grade 1 teacher just survived. He was permitted to sleep in the room attached to the storeroom and the Grade 4/5 teacher helped him out by often inviting him to share meals with her family. Khamxing, the other volunteer teacher, received two cash payments over the year, each of 55,000 kip (US$6.70), but as he came from the village he was considered by the Principal as *"already supported by his family*" and received no rice.

One of the official duties of the Principal was that he attend monthly meetings at the DEB, a 50-minute motorbike ride away. The school was also informally linked to the DEB through Khamxing's uncle who was one of three Pedagogical Advisors[14] (PAs) in the district. Khamxing's uncle had arrived at the village in 1978 and for two years had been the sole teacher responsible for all five grades. He was later transferred to another school to become Principal and then in 2000 passed the exam to work in the DEB as a Pedagogical Advisor. In this position he was responsible for the Nakasan school cluster, along with the central schools in eight other villages and their satellite schools.

CR 3.8 The village

The Village Head proved to be a good source of information. In both formal interviews and informal conversations he spoke freely of the problems the village faced, particularly in relation to education. His family were original residents of the village when, before the war, the area had been populated mainly by people from the *Suai* ethnic group. During the war the village had been bombed and he regarded himself lucky to have escaped injury when many other villagers had been killed. Unexploded ordnance (UXO) were still present and there were occasional visits to the school by UXO educators to teach the children about the dangers of picking up the "*bombies"* that still lay around. A large poster in the staffroom reminded that much of the land was contaminated and that many villagers in Laos risked their lives to farm their fields. During the war the displacement of many ethnic *Lao* people from other districts caused a flow of people into his village which was now populated predominantly by people who had intermarried with the original ethnic group.

Until recently, most villagers had farmed their own plots; however, some had started to sell land to businessmen who were establishing plantations of rubber, peanuts and vegetables in the area. Increasingly some villagers now relied on selling their labour rather than growing their own crops even though work on plantations was intermittent and the pay was not high. Villagers spoke of how the job of planting peanuts usually lasted a week or two after the first rains started, and paid 25,000 kip (US$3) a day.

The official statistics showed that in December 2009 the village had a population of 722 - 349 females and 375 males – making up 124 households, divided for administrative purposes into 12 work-groups. The average per capita income was recorded as 3,662,000 kip

[14] Typically each DEB has three Pedagogical Advisor (PA) positions. The role of the PAs is to visit designated primary schools, act as a conduit between the school and the DEB, and to provide advice and support to teachers, especially on academic matters. More detail on the responsibilities of the PAs is given in Appendix 2 and Section 5.3.4.

(US$452). The village had a small shop which sold farming tools, diesel and some household items. The village had been connected to the national grid since 2008 although only a few people used electricity for other than lighting as televisions or other electrical appliances were too expensive for most. The nearest health clinic was about an hour away on foot and it was 5km to the secondary school. Students travelled by foot, by bike, or arranged lifts on tractors.

The Village Head explained that the Village Committee encouraged people to support the development of the village, and that because of their participation in various communal activities the village had received a Developed Village Award from the district authorities. Large, newly painted signs were positioned at the entrance to the village to remind residents of their achievements. This award had required the prior attainment of several sub-awards: the Crimeless Village Award, the Cultural Village Award, the Healthy and Hygienic Village Award and the Model Village School Award. Although I was not present at the ceremony when the village received its award, Khamxing's account and his photographs, were enough to get a feeling for the occasion. Senior district officials and village officials including the Village Head, the Head Monk, senior village police and senior party members, including the school Principal, were seated on the front stage, while the villagers sat in the audience watching the dancing and listening to the speeches. Khamxing also talked about the recognition he acquired by helping with the organisation of the school building where the ceremony was held, and teaching his students how to dance for the ceremony.

However, as the Village Head explained, it was the religious activities organised by the *vat* that were *"the real focus of the villagers"*. The *vat* had existed in the village for much longer than the school and the local people trusted the monks who had lived there for many years. Still the Village Head believed that over time, the villagers would increase their support to the school:

> *People have started to support the school but not as much as we (the government) would like them to. If they could see the importance of education then it would be good as then they could encourage their children to learn to read and write and our village would develop more.*
>
> Village Head: Visit 1. Interview 1

CR 3.9 The first few weeks of teaching

As Khamxing is from the village where he teaches, he knew each of the students in his class. Officially he had 36 students, 17 of whom were girls, although on some days 39 students turned up. The other three students were not registered at the school but were staying with relatives and he allowed them to attend. Ten of the students came from a small hamlet about a kilometre away and sat together against the wall on the left hand side of the room. They were always well behaved and listened quietly to the teacher. It was the small group of boys who sat up the front that tended to dominate classroom life. Khamxing directed his attention mainly to these students as he struggled to manage their behaviour. Although there were no students in the class who were repeating, some of the boys were 12 and 13 years old as they had started school later than others. A couple of them could not read at all, while some needed a lot of help.

During my first observational visit Khamxing proudly showed me his name tag – all the teachers wore these, and he had paid 15,000 kip, 14% of his yearly 'salary', to the Principal who purchased it for him through the DEB. However, when we sat down to talk, rather than discussing teaching, Khamxing was far more interested in talking about the tasks which the Principal had assigned him - painting the flag pole, labelling the furniture, writing staff profile and enrolment posters for the staffroom, and writing up the names of the students in the various work groups on posters. The Principal had also sent him to the neighbouring hamlet to request the Village Committee to make six benches and tables. He recalled how pleased he had felt when a few weeks after his visit the items were duly delivered. He

explained that doing these jobs made him feel part of the school team and helped him to learn about the wider responsibilities associated with teaching.

In the truncated number of lessons that were observed in the first visit (the school was closed for three days out of five), I felt that Khamxing tried hard to show me what he considered his 'best' teaching. When teaching maths he brought out chopsticks to hold up and help students count; for the World Around Us lesson he had copied some pictures from the textbook and had used them when he questioned the students about safe hygiene practices; and when teaching Lao Language he asked students to sit in their work roster groups and made them read together as he walked around. However, the basic structure of his lessons remained the same - an initial explanation to the whole group, followed by a series of questions and answers, and then time for students to copy either from the board or textbooks into their notebooks. Khamxing rarely stopped and checked work or spoke to individuals, focusing instead on the whole class and on completing the content of the lesson.

CR 3.10 As the year progressed

In weeks 9 and 10 of the first semester, the school was closed while the villagers worked to construct the walls of the school and the teachers prepared for the Developed Village Award ceremony to be held in Week 11. Khamxing spent most of his days teaching the students in the Youth Union how to march and dance for the forthcoming ceremony.

When we met in week 13, the initial excitement of being a teacher, which Khamxing had spoken of, appeared to have diminished. He had come to the conclusion, he told me, that he was the kind of teacher *"who has a lot of patience - if I was not patient I would have already left by now"*. He seemed to have given up on showing me what he could do, nor was he trying to implement any of the ideas he learnt in his course. With the ceremonies over the focus was now back on teaching. So far in the year no one had formally observed him teaching, or given him feedback, and no one talked about teaching - only about how to do administrative tasks. When he tried to talk about lessons with the other teachers he was told *"so long as you follow the textbook you can do your job"*. Khamxing also spoke of how the volunteer teacher and the Principal were frequently absent, harvesting their peanut crops. While he said he understood the need for the volunteer teacher to work, as he received little support from the village, he did not see why the Principal should be away: *"why should everyone else work so hard when he doesn't?"* He explained that he would also like to be able to help his parents in the fields during school time *"but it wouldn't look good if I did that, as I have only just started work."*

By Visit 3 Khamxing seemed to have calmed down a little about the inequalities in the school and a convivial atmosphere had developed between the three younger teachers and the Principal. Khamxing reported feeling pleased with his students as they had all passed the semester one exams although he expressed surprise that all had passed and suggested that perhaps some had been helped by the teachers from the neighbouring school who had supervised the exam in his class - either that or they had been allowed to copy. He appeared to have established some routines with his class, regularly setting homework and spending more time with the weaker students. The Principal had asked him to help write the March plan and to summarise the report for the last semester. He explained that doing these tasks made him think the Principal had confidence in his work and he was pleased.

A few weeks after my third visit, the teacher for Grades 4 and 5 decided to take maternity leave for the rest of the semester. The Principal instructed Khamxing to take responsibility for the Grade 4 class of 24 students as well as the 36 in his own Grade 3 class, while he, the Principal, would teach the 21 Grade 5 students. By the end of the year the lessons Khamxing taught to both Grades 3 and 4 followed a similar pattern - scribing onto the board for one class to copy, setting them exercises, explaining a little, and then moving over to the other class to follow the same routine[15]. The pattern was interrupted only if students really could not understand and started asking questions. After a while he would come back to the first class to either give the answers or organise students to give the answers. Many students sat for long periods of time with nothing to do. At the end of Visit 4, Khamxing explained that while he had learnt a little bit about teaching multigrade in his course he had not imagined that he would have to do this himself. He spoke of how he hoped that next year he would have only one class to teach and about how he had managed to survive:

> *At first I told the two other teachers that I just wanted to leave. I was so tired, but they encouraged me to be patient. I didn't really mean that I wanted to leave because I like being a teacher, and I know that if I left I don't really know what else I would do, because working in the fields is not for the whole year, but at times I felt that I couldn't continue. Their encouragement made me keep going.*
>
> Khamxing: Visit 4. Interview 1

[15] During this time I observed Khamxing at work with both classes.

CASE RECORD 4

MISS SENG

SALAI VILLAGE SCHOOL

Case Record 4: Miss Seng

The lecturers at college told us that teaching in the primary school wasn't too hard but oh ... I would like them to teach in this primary school so they could know how difficult it really is.

Seng: Visit 1. Interview 2

CR 4.1 The first visit

On the fourth morning of the new school year I made my first visit to the Champasak District Education Bureau (DEB). I was not known in this district and was still a little anxious about how I would be received. As with the visit to Sukuma, the trip had involved crossing the Mekong on the car ferry, but once on the other side the DEB was only a short drive away. The purpose of the meeting, as with my three earlier DEB meetings that week, was to introduce myself and to present the letters approving my research. After engaging in the usual pleasantries, and discussing the schedule of visits I intended to make throughout the year, the meeting ended. I left feeling relieved that again a meeting with a DEB had gone well and no conditions had been placed on my visits to the village and the school. Together with my interpreter, Sivilay, I had been given permission to visit Champasak district whenever I chose, unaccompanied by any government 'minder'.

At the DEB I had been told that if I just kept on down the main district road it would lead me to the new teacher's house. When I reached her village I stopped for further instructions and eventually found Seng and her mother sitting outside watching two small girls. Although I had phoned and told her in advance I would visit that day, Seng seemed surprised when I arrived. And so began my fieldwork in Salai Village and my professional relationship with Seng as a beginning teacher.

CR 4.2 Family life

Seng lived with her mother and her female cousin. Her father and her brother had been away working in the north for several years and came back home only infrequently. The family home was a low-set two-bedroom house in the style of many dwellings built in the more prosperous Lao villages in the last 15 years. As is typical of most Lao houses, even those in the towns, there was no kitchen and cooking was done outside on a charcoal burner.

At the side of the house was a shaded wooden platform where, on that first day, Seng and her mother were sitting on straw mats while the two children, Seng's nieces, played nearby. An open fire was smouldering next to the platform and several large cooking pots lay empty on the ground, drying in the sun. Buckets and a hose had been left on the grass where the washing up had been done. Seng showed us where we should sit and introduced us to her mother and her nieces. Drawn into this scene of domesticity, we chatted away, Seng and I both conscious of our relative 'status' and both of us trying to put the other at ease. I asked Seng what she had been doing since she left College and she explained how each morning she and her mother made rice noodles for sale in the local village market. For the family at home this rice noodle business was their economic mainstay rather then the rice farming that most of the villagers depended on. Usually Seng and her mother made about 20 kilograms of noodles a day but during the village festivals demand soars and by working much of the night they were able to produce twice that amount. At around 5,000 kip a kilogram, the rice noodles provided them with an acceptable standard of living.

CR 4.3 Becoming a teacher

When I had last seen Seng three months before, she had been a student at the Pakse TTC, and I was interested to find out how she had managed to get her job. We talked for a time about family and village life and then our conversation moved on to her teaching position. Earlier that morning the Director of the DEB had told me that there was to be a meeting for all new teachers in the district the following Monday. I asked Seng about the meeting but she told me she had heard nothing. However, it did not appear to surprise her – after all it was only Thursday and she expected she would be told *"sometime."* I, too, was familiar with people being told of an event they had to attend just before the scheduled date – when I worked at the TTC it was not uncommon for staff to discover on a Friday afternoon that they were expected to be at a meeting on the Monday in Vientiane, a 600 km overnight bus-ride away. Many people in Laos, especially those in official positions, live under what are at times the unreasonable dictates of others in positions of authority over them.

Seng talked about the process she had gone through to get her new job. Six weeks after finishing her course and lodging an application for work with the Champasak DEB she was contacted by phone and told to bring her teaching certificate to the office. Five weeks later she received a second phone call telling her she was being sent to teach in the neighbouring village, only three kilometres away. Seng's mother spoke for the first time and told us how

happy she was her daughter not only had a job but that she did not have to leave home and would be able to travel to school on her motorbike. Seng continued:

> *I suppose I was just lucky to get the job, you see I don't know anyone in the office and neither does my mother. At first those people in the DEB made a joke asking me how I could get the graduation certificate so fast, but then they looked at my certificate and saw that my score was rather good.*
>
> Seng: Visit 2. Interview 2

Although school had already started Seng told us that she could not go until she received the official letter from the DEB. She guessed that she would probably receive this on the Monday at the meeting at the DEB. It was six more weeks before I was scheduled to see Seng again, and so after explaining the questions I wanted her to answer in her weekly journal and teaching her how to use the camera I gave her to record something of classroom life, I said goodbye and left her playing with her nieces. In only a few more days, when her working life started, she would have the responsibility of caring for and teaching many more children.

During the visits to her school I learnt more about Seng's background. She was a few years older than the three other new teachers in the study, and unlike them had not gone straight from high school to teachers' college:

> *When I was young I dreamt of becoming a nurse. After high school I passed the entrance exam for the nursing college, and even received a scholarship, but my mother didn't want me to go. It takes three years to qualify as a nurse and she thought this was too long for me to be away. So I stayed home and learnt how to make clothes. Then one day, about three years after I left school, I thought maybe she would let me become a teacher as the course was only one year long – so I went to the college and took the exam and after I was accepted and won the scholarship my mother agreed that I could go. Even though I was studying for the year, I came back home every weekend except for two, for my mother's sake.*
>
> Seng: Visit 4. Interview 5

Being a bright student with a good high school record, Seng won her scholarship from the college on merit. However, while the scholarship covered the cost of tuition fees there was not enough left on which to live. Although Seng was able to board with her relatives in town she still relied on her mother to pay for basic necessities and for food. Her mother gave her money each week from the rice noodle business and Seng worked in her spare time making and selling hand-made clothing to cover the cost of travelling back and forth from the college to her home.

Although Seng now had a job she was employed as a volunteer teacher and consequently still reliant on her mother's support. This type of situation is not unusual and many young teachers find themselves in an unpaid limbo for up to four years after they start work while they wait and hope that their positions will be confirmed and made permanent. For Seng the process of becoming 'permanent' started early in the year and during each visit I heard updates. Two months after starting work she was summonsed to the DEB offices and told to bring in her papers and apply for permanency; three months later she was told to travel to the provincial capital for further stamps; and shortly before the end of the year she was notified she had been made permanent and was to be paid nine months back salary - less 5%.

CR 4.4 The school

The school where Seng was appointed to teach is at the end of a dirt track, about 500 metres off the main district road. As I drove up the track for the first time I was very

conscious of the dark rain clouds looming above the hills in front of me, and worried that if it rained too much my little car could get bogged. As it turned out, this never happened, but during my trips to the villages the concern that something untoward might occur, whether mechanical failure, or an accident, or sickness, was always in the back of my mind.

I had been expecting that the school would be an old wooden structure like those in the three other villages I had visited that week, but here, to my surprise, was a solid new concrete building with a green tiled roof gleaming in the morning sun. An old wooden building, leaning at a precarious angle, sat somewhat incongruously next door and served as a temporary preschool until such time as the community had sufficient funds to allow them to rebuild. Construction and outfitting of the main school had been paid for as a gesture of goodwill by a Japanese university that was undertaking archaeological research in the area. The village had been given a *"healthy grant"*, and unlike other aid programs there was no requirement for a community contribution in either labour or materials as *"everything was provided."* However, the community did build a fence around the perimeter of the school yard and helped to dig the foundations for the new building.

With five classrooms and an office the school was similar in design to the many new schools that have been built in Laos in the last 10 years through large-scale external aid projects[16]. The rooms were built in a long line with doorways that opened out onto a covered veranda, and with lockable wooden-shuttered windows on either side of the classrooms that gave some cross-ventilation. Each classroom measured about 6 metres wide by 8 metres long and was designed to accommodate around 35 children, although in practice whatever number was necessary would be squeezed in. The rooms were light and airy and had lined ceilings with solid walls between the classrooms that allowed for teaching to occur in a private setting undisturbed by children in other classes. Furniture included splinter free desks and benches, a teacher's desk and chair, a good quality blackboard fixed to the wall at the front of the room, and a lockable cupboard for books and equipment.

Over the months I pieced together a little of the history of the school. In the days of French colonization Champasak district had been a thriving area and the capital of the province before the seat of power was shifted 40 km upstream to Pakse on the opposite bank of the river at the confluence of the Se Done and the Mekong Rivers. Because of its relative prosperity and closeness to the former provincial capital, there had been a school in the

[16] See Appendix 2 for information on international educational aid projects to the Lao PDR.

village for around 80 years. The original school, however, had been very basic – just an open wooden building with no internal walls. In its last few years rain and wind had come through the windows and the roof leaked. Finally, when most of the timbers had been eaten through by ants and the building had been on the verge of collapse, the Japanese arrived and the school was rebuilt on a new site closer to the main road. Whatever timber could salvaged was used by the community to build the preschool.

The school had a good supply of textbooks, however, as the Principal explained, the students were not allowed to take them home in case they became lost or damaged and *"if that happened the Japanese might become angry."* The teachers were hoping that funds could be found for the school to be connected to the electricity supply so they would be able to play music when they taught dancing and use loudspeakers when they held parties. There was talk that the Japanese were going to provide water and toilets, but in the meantime a grove of bamboo plants located at one end of the school grounds served as the toilet, and the students brought their own water from home.

CR 4.5 The students

The statistics on the school were on permanent display on a blackboard in the Principal's office. Early in my first week he called me in, sat me down and read to me from the list. This was, he informed me, a school that was big enough to be classified as a complete school. The student population stood at 165 and included 23 pre-school students. Grades 1 to 5 were roughly the same size as each other with around 30 students in each class. There were no multigrade classes and each grade had its own teacher. And there were no outlying satellite schools to be managed; however, during exam times, some staff got together with teachers in the neighbouring school to share exam questions.

From what I could see the children were not as poor as those I had seen during visits to more remote villages. All the children wore sandals and their clothes did not look like over-sized hand-me-downs. Most students wore the school uniform - girls in a white blouse and the traditional long dark blue or black *sinh*; boys in black shorts and a white shirt. All of the students had some form of school bag and carried new notebooks. Elsewhere, in very poor areas, I had seen children not only wearing clothes that their elder siblings had grown out of, but also recycling old notebooks by using the space on the page left between the lines of words written in by the original owner. By contrast with children from poor areas, these children from Salai village looked well fed and the Principal confirmed that he thought they all came to school after having eaten breakfast. During the breaks the children seemed to have high amounts of energy to run off. Many of the boys kicked an old ball around the muddy field, while others, girls as well as boys, played games of chase. A wheel rim, hung from a pole outside the Grade 1 classroom, served as the bell. When a teacher came over and hit the rim with an iron rod to signal the end of the break, the children gathered up clothes and shoes which had been discarded while playing, and drifted back into class.

CR 4.6 The staff

On the first day of my observational visits I met the Principal and the staff and was invited to explain my research to them. As I did so, I tried to allay the fears I felt sure they had that I, an outsider and a *falang,* was there to check on them. After the meeting I noticed that when classes started all the teachers had their windows and doors closed, so as I walked along the veranda it was impossible to know what was happening inside the rooms. However, during later visits, as we got to know each other, a more relaxed atmosphere developed and I sensed that the staff had come to accept that I was not there to write evaluation reports on them or to inspect their lesson plans. The windows and doors were left open and the teachers wandered outside their classrooms to chat, without worrying about me, and I was able to gain glimpses into their classrooms and see a little of their teaching practices. Teachers were usually present, classrooms were mainly quiet, and students commonly worked with bowed heads copying from the board or the textbook.

The school had a staff of seven teachers - two male and five female. This included the Principal, who had no teaching duties, and the preschool teacher. Except for Seng, all the teachers were permanent members of staff. During the breaks most of the staff disappeared to

the stall at the back of the school which was run by the Principal's wife. For a small fee she was allowed to sell drinks and snacks. There was a wooden platform nearby, next to a clump of bamboo, and this was a cool place where teachers met and relaxed. In many ways there was a casual atmosphere around the school. Teachers were often at the snack stall well after the bell had rung, others would come out onto the veranda during class time to chat to each other or to smoke (the men at least), and it was not unusual to see a teacher in a classroom with a baby. Over the weeks, mainly through informal conversations at the snack stall, I learnt a little about each teacher's career.

The preschool teacher was an older woman. She stayed with her class in the separate wooden building but joined in with the other staff for morning breaks. She had left school herself at the end of lower secondary and then completed a two-year teaching diploma. For much of her 20 years as a teacher she had taught primary classes, but with the recent introduction of preschool education she had been glad to move and work with younger children. The Grade 1 teacher, a man, was the longest serving member of staff. He had graduated 33 years before and had taught in a number of schools in Champasak district, although he had been at this school for only the last three years. This was where his parents had lived and he told me how he expected he would teach here until his retirement at age 55. The Grade 2 teacher had completed upper secondary school and had then studied for one year at the TTC before graduating. After five years in the classroom she said she finally felt confident about what she was doing. Six months before she had had her first child and she regarded herself as fortunate that her mother-in-law was able to mind the baby at home. The Grade 3 teacher was Seng. She was appointed to a vacancy created when the previous teacher was transferred to the school back in her home village. The Grade 4 teacher, like Seng, had completed upper secondary school and so was able to keep her training course down to one year. She had taught in the same school for ten years, but was finding it difficult because she now had a young daughter, a toddler, who she quite often had to bring to school.

The most experienced teacher taught the Grade 5 class. She graduated in the mid 1970s and worked for many years in Vientiane, the nation's capital, where she was a *"model teacher."* During my last visit to the school she took me into her confidence:

> *We experienced a lot of difficult times in the late 1970s. I thought life was too hard so I planned to escape with some friends to Thailand. Several of them left and never came back but I got scared and stayed behind. I'm glad now that I didn't leave my home.*

Grade 5 Teacher: Visit 1. Interview 1

In all she taught in Vientiane for twenty-five years before returning to her parents' village where, when she wasn't teaching, she cared for her elderly mother.

CR 4.7 The Principal

The Principal had worked in his non-teaching position for 13 years. Before that he had worked for 17 years as a classroom teacher. As there were no outlying satellite schools for him to go and visit and support, it was hard to imagine what he did all day. For such a small school there was a limit to the amount of paperwork and reporting he could do for the DEB. During my first visit I was told that the Principal rarely came and was waiting to retire. Three months into the new school year, he did retire. There was no school party, no farewell. As Seng explained, he just left:

> *One day the old Principal didn't turn up in the morning. Then the DEB came along and told the Grade 1 teacher to act as the Principal. Straight away he walked out of his classroom and went to sit in the office. He told me and the other teachers to take it in turns to look after his class.*
>
> Seng: Visit 2. Interview 1

According to Seng the burden of looking after the Grade 1 teacher's students fell mostly on her. A new principal, a middle-aged woman, arrived a few weeks later and the Grade 1 teacher went back to his class. The new principal came from a neighbouring village where she had worked for the last 20 years as the head of a cluster of preschool classrooms and was well known to her new staff. Unlike the previous occupant of the position, she was usually at school except when called to a meeting at the DEB. As the year progressed she slowly introduced changes - the weekly assembly was replaced with a daily event for students to hear announcements and to salute the flag; the staffroom was opened up so that it was no longer mainly an office but more of a place where teachers could meet in break time; and after a few weeks regular meetings were being held for all staff to talk about issues and events around the school.

At Lao New Year the Principal organised the staff to hold a school party for parents and villagers. This was her first attempt to try to involve the community in the life of the school and as she told me:

It's not easy getting support for this school – the village has no tradition of it. Trying to involve the community in the school can't occur immediately. It's best to get them interested by inviting them to school celebrations first.

Principal: Visit 4. Interview 1

Several times during discussions Seng acknowledged the positive influence the new Principal had on her own work. Not long after she arrived at the school, the Principal went to the Village Head to explain how Seng, their new teacher, was working without a salary:

Without the Principal talking to the Village Committee about me I don't think they would have even known that I was working here. It was only after she went to them explaining my case and asked directly for some support that they gave me 200,000 kip. They did this twice and so I was able to get some money which helped pay for my petrol and some new clothes.

Seng: Visit 4. Interview 1

CR 4.8 The village

During my first visit to the school, I asked the Principal to help me meet someone from the Village Committee in order to make my presence known officially and to gather information on the community, but it was not until my second visit that I was summonsed to meet with the two Deputy Heads of the village. While data on the population and number of households were provided, information on incomes was *"unavailable."* However, even without the numbers it was clear that the village was not poor - a variety of types of rice were grown in the fertile flood plains of the Mekong River and most families sold excess rice to buy other goods. There was also a variety of fruit and vegetables for sale in the market. I was told that there were 1,178 people living in 231 households in the village, that all residents were ethnic *Lao*, and that all families except two grew rice. Around 100 village residents were registered for work in Thailand and remittances from these people supported other family members. Some families also remained in close contact with relatives who left as refugees in the late 1970s and were now living in countries such as the United States and Australia.

During our meeting I discovered that neither of the two Village Committee representatives were aware that there was a new teacher at their school who travelled daily from the neighbouring village. I told them that she was a volunteer but there was no mention of providing her with any financial support. When I explained that the purpose of my research

was to work with this new teacher, the Village Committee members asked *"Do you have a project? Are you going to support the school?"* Feeling both apologetic and inadequate I had to give an honest but blunt *"no"* to both questions. Over the next three visits, although I slept in a house next door to the one belonging to the Village Head, I never met up with any Village Committee members again, nor was I asked again for any kind of support. Generally I was left alone to interact with the teachers and to walk around the village, visiting the local *vat* and the various historical sites in the area as I pleased.

CR 4.9 The first few weeks of teaching

By the time I made the first observational visit to the school, Seng had already been teaching for five weeks. However, in week four Typhoon Ketsana had swept through and devastated the region. When I arrived the villagers were still clearing up after winds of 140km per hour tore roofs off houses and destroyed many thousands of hectares of rice crops. In Champasak district no one was killed, although over 20 deaths were reported in other parts of the country. The sturdy concrete school building was still intact, and the young saplings which had been planted by the students and teachers around the perimeter of the school yard were battered but still standing. Children who were not having to help their parents clean up and harvest what was left of their rice were back at school.

In week six of the term, when I asked Seng how it had been going, she told me that she had hardly talked to the Principal, and that no one in the village knew she was a volunteer:

When I arrived, the Principal told me what class I would teach and took me to my room. He didn't tell me anything about the school or about the other teachers or what I should do. Luckily I knew the Grade 4 teacher as she is my cousin and she helped me a bit, but I didn't know anyone else. In the first couple of weeks I had to teach my cousin's class as well as my own because she was busy harvesting her rice. Then the Grade 2 teacher asked if I could do the same for her. I couldn't say "no" to them as I didn't want to have bad relationships, but it was really hard.

Seng: Visit 1. Interview 2

Starting work had not been easy for Seng. She had commenced teaching one week after the start of the term, was responsible in her first two weeks for looking after other classes as well as her own, and in the fourth week, due to the typhoon, school had been cancelled for three days. In those first weeks she had received no feedback on how she was going and had had to ask for help rather than be offered advice voluntarily by others. The week of my first observational visit was really Seng's first week of 'normal teaching' – 'normal', so long as you set aside the fact that two observers were sitting at the back of the room watching her every move. It was no surprise that she had not completed her journals and had taken only a few photos. When I asked, *"What has been easy?"* Seng replied:

Nothing – everything is hard. When I go back home at night I don't tell my mother how difficult it really is, as I don't want to worry her. I just focus on being happy that I have a job.

Seng: Visit 1. Interview 2

CR 4.10 As the year progressed

The classroom observations were clearly a strain on Seng, especially at first. During one of our last interviews she spoke of how she felt embarrassed and particularly conscious of our presence on the not infrequent occasions when she lost control of her class. With only 31 students the class was relatively small but there were 7 or 8 boys who, initially, did not listen to her and who she had great difficulty managing. These students could hardly read or write, or do calculations, and in fact, only about 5 or 6 of the students in the class could do the exercises in the textbook without a great deal of help. Over the year this unruly behaviour gradually subsided but never entirely disappeared.

A regular theme that Seng raised in our discussions was the issue of wanting to get on with the students while still maintaining control. The times she reported she was best able to

relate to her students was when she had them performing a puppet play, building a garden, and dancing - all extra curricular activities unsanctioned by the textbook:

> *The kinds of activities which make me close to the students are those which aren't in the textbook such as gardening and dancing. During these times I think we feel close to each other - I can talk to them easily and they listen and get on with doing what I ask, but inside the classroom there is like a wall between us. You see during the lessons I have to teach to the textbook and there is not much interaction between us but at other times we can work together and be closer.*
>
> Seng: Visit 2. Interview 1

The problem of 'getting on with the students' by involving them in enjoyable activities but constantly feeling constrained to follow crowded textbook lessons, was never solved. On my last visit Seng spoke of what she saw as her achievements:

> *I taught them to dance, and they made me feel proud when they danced for the village festival. You know, some teachers in the neighbouring village had talked about me earlier in the year saying that I wouldn't be able to do this, as students at this school had never danced, but at the ceremony it was proof that the students had learnt something from me.*
>
> Seng: Visit 4. Interview 2

The Case Records: Some Final Comments

For the beginning teachers, with exams out of the way, the end of the school year heralded a return to farming. Two went to plant rice for their families, one to weed his own coffee fields, and the fourth to harvest sweet potato and peanuts. Both of the young women rang to say that they were now permanent teachers - their applications had been successfully processed and one of them had even been promised nine months of retrospective salary. The two male teachers, however, would have to wait, but no one had indicated for how long.

By the end of their first year in the classroom, each of the four teachers had at least 'survived'. But each of them, in their own way, could lay claim to a greater measure of success. For Bounyang success was seeing a few of his Grade 1 children learning to read. This had made him and the parents very pleased. Tiputai, with her class of 70, had ended the year exhausted, not believing she had taught her students much at all. She had also adopted some of the less professional practices of the teachers around her. But for Tiputai, permanency was success, and the possibility that next year, with a smaller class she could do things differently. Khamxing showed little interest in teaching, but revelled in his newly acquired status of *Ajan*[17] and the recognition he believed the villagers were now according him. He was, he felt, seen in the village as someone with a future. Seng had partially won over the unruly group of boys in her class and she had also taught all her students to dance. For this she and her students had been praised at the village ceremony. She too felt that she had acquired some status in the community.

At the beginning of their second year of teaching, I rang each teacher to find out what classes they had been assigned and to wish them luck. Bounyang had said goodbye to half his class who were moving up and would face newcomers and those repeating with less trepidation than in his first year. Khamxing would no longer be juggling two classes as the Grade 4/5 teacher had returned from maternity leave. Seng was pleased with her permanency and was happy to pass her group of 'unruly' boys up to the Grade 4 teacher. And Tiputai had got what she was hoping for - a small Grade 5 class in a room of her own. I wondered how each teacher would cope and whether they would do anything differently from their first year and offered up a quiet prayer for each.

[17] *"Ajan"* or "teacher" is widely used in Laos as a term of respect.

Appendix 2. Education: The Situation in Lao PDR[1]

> *Laos is a political place ... you have to work within the system ... work within the decrees sent down by the Minister. If you want to work here you can change the content but that's all, not the structures. We have the structure - it's what's inside them that we can change.*
>
> Lao Colleague, 2009

This Appendix provides an historical overview of education in Laos and then describes the current systems for schooling and teacher training. Major educational reform initiatives are then considered, particularly those which have focused on improving quality. The Appendix thus provides background for this research study into the professional experiences of beginning teachers in Laos.

App 2.1[2] Historical Overview

Prior to colonisation by France, formal education was contained within the Buddhist *vat* or temple. Here a select group of boys and young men were taught *Pali* and *Lao* by monks focused on imparting the traditional knowledge contained in the canons of Buddhist literature (Bouasivath, 1996). By contrast, there was no formal system of education for girls and their learning was gained through practical experience in and around the home (Pathammavong, 1955). For the many non-Buddhist peoples spread across what is now the Lao PDR, the education processes took place as they always had – mostly informally within the family, and within their own cultural groups (Faming, 2007).

After the French took control of Laos in 1893, formal secular education was introduced, and by 1901 schools had been established in each of the main administrative towns, with the monastic system of education being retained alongside (Lockhardt, 2001). However, by comparison to the total population, the number of Lao able to access a formal (French) education was extremely small. Langer (1971) claims that by the end of the colonial era in 1946, only 15,000 Lao had ever been to a government school. The primary purpose of these schools was to train young Lao men for administration positions in the civil service. The system was also tailored to meet the needs of a tiny Lao elite (Vistarini, 1978). Following this argument, Chagnon and Rumpf (1982) maintain that during French rule, the educational

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[1] The material in Appendix 2 expands upon the descriptions of the 'Lao Education System' (Section 1.1.5) and the 'Teacher Education Program' (Section 4.2) in the body of the thesis. For the sake of completeness and comprehensibility, there is necessarily some repetition in Appendix 2 of material from those earlier sections.

[2] All of the sections in Appendix 2 begin with the letters 'App' (for Appendix) to distinguish them from sections in the body of the thesis.

needs of most Lao were *"benignly neglected*" (p.164). This depiction of the French colonial masters offering only extremely limited educational opportunities to Lao is also supported by Phonekeo (1996), who notes that of its three colonies in South East Asia, the educational efforts of the French were concentrated in Vietnam.

During the colonial period, the curriculum in use provided Lao children with a French 'orientation' to the world. Although Lao language was taught in the first three grades of primary school, French was the language of instruction for the final two grades as well as in the secondary schools. Rehbein (2007) describes the education system at this time as 'three-tiered', with a classical French education provided for the Lao elite, a basic education for those Lao marked for positions in the colonial civil service, and a religious education in monastery schools for some of the brighter boys and young men.

During the 'post independence' period when the Royal Government of Lao (RGL) held power (1953-1975), the differentiated system of education established by the French continued. However, it was an extremely unsettled time as the changing fortunes within the civil war that engulfed the country waxed and waned, and as American forces conducted their 'secret' and devastating bombing campaign against communist forces, particularly but not exclusively, in the north and in the east along the so called Ho Chi Minh trail linking North and South Vietnam.

Within this context the RGL undertook various educational reforms in the 1960s, including the construction of some primary schools. Curriculum change was also instigated and in 1962 the amount of teaching done in Lao language was increased. However, access to education was still very limited for most Lao, French remained the medium of instruction in secondary schools until 1972, and French was the language of the examinations. Writing during that time Halpern (1964) commented:

> *Achieving even a modest education was next to impossible for a villager, since either he had no access to primary schools or the ones he attended offered inferior training in French, the absolute prerequisite for further education.*
>
> (*ibid*., p. 18)

The arrival of American aid in the 1960s, added another dimension to the delivery of education, as the Americans attempted to break the hold of the traditional French influence. Substantial funds were provided by the USA to support the establishment of several comprehensive secondary schools, the building of four technical schools and the establishment of teacher-training programs (Chagnon & Rumpf, 1982). In the urban areas

where education was influenced by French and American aid, education was largely seen to be a benefit granted to those children whose parents were, in one way or another, supporting the Americans in their war efforts (*ibid*.).

While education in the areas controlled by the RGL was characterised by linguistic and cultural barriers - namely the teaching of the curriculum in French and later in English, in the 'liberated' mountainous areas under control of the *Pathet Lao*, a different kind of education system was evolving. In these areas, efforts were directed at teaching literacy and politics to the Lao and to ethnic minorities for the purpose of political revolution. The language of instruction was Lao and the curriculum was shaped by the practicalities of real life. Educational initiatives in these areas received advisory support and funds from the communists in North Vietnam (Stuart-Fox, 1997).

The educational work conducted by the *Pathet Lao*[3] along the country's eastern borders became the cornerstone for the education system established after the 1975 Revolution by the new government. It has been estimated that at this time only 20% of the population had completed six years of schooling and only 2% had completed the full twelve years of school: the challenge faced by the new regime was immense.[4] The first educational tasks for the government were to establish an extensive system of village primary schools and to expand the teacher training system in order to produce the teachers needed for such a rapid increase in numbers. While there was an acute shortage of resource materials, the curriculum documents which were available highlighted the importance of nation building, patriotism, ethnic solidarity and the development of a socialist morality (Lockhardt, 2001).

Almost forty years have passed since the establishment of the Lao PDR. After a number of shifts in economic policy and financial circumstance – including the failure to establish a socialist economy and the loss of aid with the collapse of the former Soviet Union – the government started to look more widely for assistance with development projects, including educational development, from countries and donors across the world. Educational assistance came initially in the form of tertiary level scholarships for study in Vietnam, and this trend has continued with, among others, Australia, Japan, Sweden, Thailand and China all having, or at some time having had, substantial scholarship programs for study outside of Laos.

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3 The *Pathet Lao* was the communist political movement and organisation that assumed power in Laos in 1975 at the end of the Lao Civil War.

4 These figures derive from the Royal Lao Government's National Bulletin of Statistics (1974) cited in Chagnon and Rumpf (1982, p. 167).

In 1997, 22 years after the 1975 Revolution, Laos extended its relationship with other neighbouring countries and became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). At the same time NGOs, international donor agencies and western countries started to increase their assistance to help improve education in Laos. However, with aid came pressure to implement social and economic reform which in turn influenced the direction of the educational policies in Laos. Efforts to improve policies directed at basic education were part of the First Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP 1) implemented in the 1990s and funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2000). Similar reforms introduced over the last decade aimed at transforming the education system are discussed in Section 2.4.

It is interesting to note that in its 7th National Social and Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) (GoL, 2011) the Government of Lao (GoL) has once again emphasised the responsibility the education system has for developing the country's socio-economic potential and the major role it has to play in tackling the 'eradication of poverty'.

App 2.2 The System of Education in Lao

Since the mid 1990s Laos has made significant gains in increasing access to formal schooling as well as establishing a comprehensive teacher training system. This section, which, for the sake of completeness, in part duplicates material presented earlier in the thesis (see Sections 1.1.5 and 4.2) gives a brief description of the organisation of each sub-system.

App 2.2.1 Administration of education

The education system in Laos is established under the Lao PDR Education Law[5] and administered by the MoE[6] under regulations and decrees issued by the Minister. Long-term goals and direction for the sector are given through the National Socio-Economic Development Plans drawn up by government every five years[7] along with other interlocking planning documents such as the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy[8] and the National Plan of Action for Education for All[9]. International aid agencies such as the Asian

5 See GoL (2007) for the Education Law. An analysis of the Education Law can be found in Hayden and Martin (2007).

6 After Laos hosted the 2009 South East Asian Games, the Government expanded the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to include sport and in September 2011 renamed the Ministry, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES). However, the fieldwork for this study was undertaken in 2009-2010; the description of the education system given in Section 1.1.5 and in Appendix 2 reflects the situation at that time when the schools were answerable to the MoE. In general terms, at the time of writing in 2012, the structures described above are still applicable.

7 See GoL (2006a) and GoL (2011) for the 6th and the 7th National Social and Economic Development Plan.

8 See GoL (2004).

9 See MoE (2005b).

Development Bank (ADB) and donor countries such as Australia also exert considerable influence on the educational agenda through large-scale projects and funding allocations.

The MoE is structured into twenty-one divisions[10] which extend the bureaucracy through the provinces and districts down to the schools. Supervisory and inspectorial responsibilities are carried out in each of the 16 provinces and in the Vientiane municipality through 17 Provincial Education Services (PES), and at the district level by 142 District Education Bureaus (DEB). Each PES prepares budgets, manages funding, appoints staff and distributes resources for the schools in its province and oversights the working of each of its DEBs. At the district level the DEB is responsible for ensuring that schools are open and operating to a standard timetable, that textbooks are distributed, and that school statistics are recorded and collated. The DEB is also responsible for providing teaching support to schools through Pedagogical Advisors (PAs); however, while the official duties of the PAs[11] include an advisory role, in practice their work tends towards inspectorial visits.

At the school level, responsibility for general operations and monthly reporting to the DEB lies with the principal. Since a Prime Ministerial decree was issued in 2008[12], all villages are required to establish a Village Education Development Committee[13] (VEDC) to work with local principals to oversee the running of the school, to ensure that buildings are safe and to see that 'volunteer' teachers awaiting permanency are supported by the village.

App 2.2.2 Levels of education

The Lao education system operates at five levels:

(i) Early Childhood Education

Nursery care (3 months to three years of age) and pre-primary education (three to five years of age); however, this level of education is under-developed in most parts of Laos.

(ii) General Education

Ostensibly twelve years of schooling - five years of basic education in Primary School which in theory if not in practice, is compulsory; four years of Lower Secondary School; and, three years of Upper Secondary School. Laos, however, is still struggling to meet the second

10 Details of the internal structure of the MoE are available on the Government of Lao website <http://www.laopdr.gov.la>
11 Ministerial Decree No 146/MOE.DGE/2007. (MoE, 2007b).
12 Prime Ministerial Decree No 13/PM (9 June 2008) (MoE, 2008c).
13 See Section 5.2.2 for a discussion of the role of the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC).

Millennium Development Goal[14] of providing five years of basic education to all children. Gender, ethnicity, language of instruction and village locations are all major issues of contention with respect to access, participation and completion.

(iii) Technical and Vocational Training

Courses of up to four years duration are available in technical colleges in the larger towns; however, places are limited and there is significant pressure on popular courses such as nursing and finance. This level previously included the lower levels of training at the three former TTS, now classified as Teacher Education Institutions (TEI) but are now included within higher education.

(iv) Higher Education

Degree courses offered at the universities range from four to five years duration and include the training of upper secondary school teachers. In 2008 the resources at the three public universities[15] (the National University of Lao [NUOL] in Vientiane, Champasak University in Pakse and Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang) were limited and standards low (ADB, 2009; Boupha, 2008) yet since that time the sector has been undergoing rapid expansion. Additional public universities have been established in or are being planned for, Savannakhet and Xiengkhuang, while private universities have also been mooted, including a Chinese funded university in Vientiane. In 2009 there were also 86 private institutions or colleges offering higher education courses, the majority of them focused on English language or commerce. The ability of the country to adequately staff and maintain an appropriate level of resources to these institutions and so provide a 'quality' education is questionable. See Chapman (2002) for an analysis of the factors driving Higher Education in Laos.

(v) Non-Formal Education

The focus of the educational efforts at this level is on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of young people in villages who have dropped out of school and adults who have never attended or not completed primary school. Regular classes are supposedly run in the evenings and taught by one or more of the local teachers on a voluntary basis.[16] The emotional appeal of non-formal education links back to the revolutionary days of struggle prior to 1975. It is difficult to find information on the extent or effectiveness of this work.

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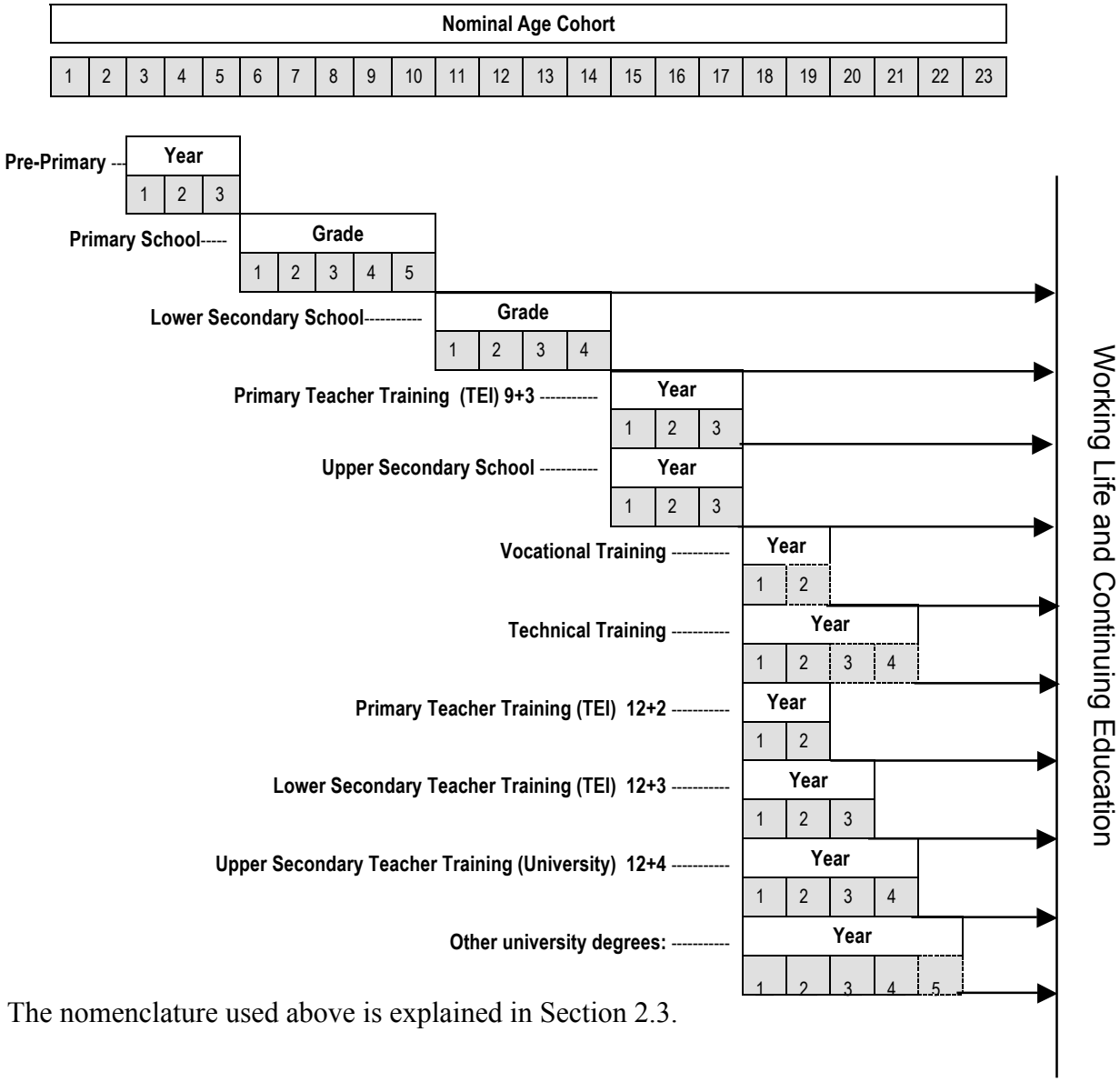
[14] The aim of the Government is to meet Millennium Development Goal 2, that by 2015 *"children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education".*

[15] There is also a University of Health Sciences administered by the Ministry of Health.

[16] Personal communication, officer in the Department of Non-Formal Education, MoE, November 2010.

Lao Education System: Pre-Primary to Post Secondary Levels



The nomenclature used above is explained in Section 2.3.

Source: Figure adapted from *Education For All Mid-Decade Assessment (*MoE, 2008e).

The structure of the Lao education system is summarised in the figure above. It shows a nominal path from pre-primary through to post secondary levels and includes the structure of the teacher training courses as at 2010:

- 9+3 Primary teacher training TEI course
- 12+2 Primary teacher training TEI course
- 12+3 Lower secondary teacher training TEI course
- 12+4 Upper secondary teacher training University course

App 2.2.3 Primary Schools, students and teachers

In the 2008-2009 school year, when preparatory work for this study was undertaken, there were officially 8,871 primary schools across Laos[17]. However, of these schools only 51.7% were 'complete' meaning that they offered the full five grades of primary school. The remainder were 'incomplete' schools and attached as 'satellites' to a central complete school. In these incomplete schools teachers often have to teach multi-grade classes. At a level above the school, several complete primary schools are often linked together in a *'muad'* or 'cluster'. The 'cluster' is an organisational structure used by the District Education Bureaus (DEB) to gather and disseminate information, to arrange meetings, and very occasionally to deliver inservice programs to teachers. (TEADC, 2004b).

In round figures, in 2008-2009 the country maintained a teaching force of about 29,060 teachers for the 908,800 primary school students enrolled in its 8,800 primary schools. This gave a Student : Teacher Ratio (STR) of approximately 31:1. However, there were and still are large variations across the country (Beneviste *et al*., 2008) and this pattern is reflected in the widely varying class sizes in the four case records in this study.

Not all teachers are formally qualified although the number of staff now recognised as qualified has increased dramatically over the last decade, due primarily to the workings of the Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP) (see Section 2.3.2). In 1985 only 60% of primary school teachers were qualified (Thant & Vokes, 1997) while by 2006, the percentage of qualified or trained primary school teachers had reached 89% (MoE, 2006a). The next section provides an overview of the system of teacher training and the options available for prospective teachers in Laos.

App 2.3 Teacher Education

Since 1975, the government's ongoing concern to train teachers has steered the teacher training system through far more changes than the primary school system. Confronted by a serious lack of qualified teachers the government created a diverse range of programs to meet the need of educating a predominantly rural population. By the mid-1990s a system of 59 small teacher training colleges (41 responsible for training primary school teachers, 17 for lower secondary teachers and one for training upper secondary teachers) had been set up across the country (ADB, 2000, p. 109).

[17] The figures quoted in this section for the number of schools, students and teachers are drawn from MoE Annual Bulletin 2008-2009 (MoE, 2009b).

In 1998, as part of the First Quality Education Improvement Project (EQIP I),[18] the 59 small teacher training colleges were rationalised and amalgamated into a system of eight regional teacher training institutions, (plus a physical education college, an art college and a college for monks.) Five of these institutions were Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) and authorised to train primary and lower secondary teachers, and three were Teacher Training Schools (TTS) authorised to train primary and some pre-school teachers. In 2010 distinctions between TTCs and TTSs were progressively removed, a common nomenclature of Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) introduced, and course offerings expanded. While all the TEIs became authorised to train teachers through to the lower secondary level, the larger TEIs also began to offer degree level courses. By 2011 primary and lower secondary teachers were being trained through one of the eight regional Teacher Education Institutions (TEI) (see Map 1) while training for upper secondary teachers was provided through the Faculty of Education (FoE) at the National University of Laos (NUOL) in Vientiane.

Teacher training programs were initially designed around the number of years of formal schooling which prospective teachers had completed. The system offered one, two and three year teaching certificates for those who had completed either five years or eight years of formal education and a number of additional years of study in a training college or training school. Consequently the primary teacher training courses became known as the 5+1, 5+2, 5+3, 8+1, 8+2, and 8+3 programs. Later, when a total of 11 years of primary and high school education became the norm, the 5+ and the 8+ programs were phased out in most colleges and a one-year 11+ diploma, the 11+1 program, was introduced.[19] The 11+1 program, through which the beginning teachers who are the focus of this study graduated, was offered for the last time in the 2008-2009 academic year. In 2010 when lower secondary school was extended from three years to four years, the 11+1 program was upgraded and a two-year diploma, the 12+2 program, was offered in its place.

The Teacher Education and Administrator Development Centre (TEADC) based at the FoE at NUOL is responsible for the development of the curricula for Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs). The Centre works closely with the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) in the MoES on curricula and textbook development for all pre-service teacher-training programs.

[18] EQIP I was funded by ADB from 1991 to 2000, (ADB, 2000).
[19] The 8 + 3 courses were retained in the Teacher Training Schools in Salavanh, Xiengkhuang and Luang Nham Tha.

App 2.3.1 Pre-service teacher training for primary school teachers

Between 1994 and 2010, there were two main primary school teacher qualifications available in Laos. They were a one-year diploma undertaken after completing eleven years of formal schooling (the 11+1 program), or if the candidate had completed only eight years of formal schooling, a three-year certificate (the 8+3 program). For several years it was also possible for those who had completed only five years of primary school education to study for a four-year certificate (the 5+4 program). This program, supported by the Lao Australian Basic Education Program (LABEP), was offered through the TTSs and supported primarily students from remote areas who had been unable to access secondary education and where it was hard to staff the schools.

In 2010 several changes were introduced to the teacher education system to take into account both the need for better-trained primary school teachers as well as the extension in the length of schooling from 11 to 12 years. The changes resulted in the one-year diploma being extended to two years and made available only to students who had completed 12 years of formal school education, that is the 11+1 diploma, was discontinued and replaced by a 12+2 year diploma. The previous three-year certificate which had been offered to graduates with eight years of formal schooling (the 8+3 program) was now offered only to students who had completed nine years of formal schooling (the 9+3 program).

App 2.3.2 Teacher Upgrading Program

A second pathway for gaining teacher qualifications has been through the Teacher Upgrading Program (TUP) which commenced in 1992 against a backdrop of attempts to extend access to education in rural areas (Lachanthaboun, Phomsavanh, & Thomas, 2005). The program was offered to those who were unable to access formal pre-service courses in the TEIs but who had been employed as under-qualified teachers in hard to staff schools. Typically the TUP is for teachers who already have a 5+3 certificate and who wish to upgrade to an 8+3 certificate. There are currently 17 Teacher Upgrading Centres, one in each of the provinces across the country. Staff follow a standard curriculum and the program is delivered during summer vacation breaks across two years. Upon completion of the course, the qualification is awarded by the Ministry of Education.

App 2.3.3 Ongoing professional development

The provision of professional development or in-service training as it is commonly known in Laos, could be described as a loose conglomeration of individual programs funded

by a range of donor agencies. In 2006 the MoE conducted an investigation into the professional development needs of its teachers.[20] Through this study, many MoE staff became aware of the disparate range of unaccredited in-service programs for teachers that were being funded by a range of donors. As part of an effort to reclaim its authority over the direction of professional development, the Ministry of Education developed its *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010)* [TESAP] (MoE, 2006a). One of the key initiatives in this plan was to give, under the guidance of the DTE, responsibility to the TEIs for the provision of inservice training for teachers, formerly the responsibility of the DPPE.

In 2008 the Ministry of Education commissioned a further study into in-service training. The audit that was conducted showed that there were 24 agencies (including NGOs, bilateral donors and UN agencies) supporting, and in some cases delivering, around 49 short in-service training courses across the country for primary teachers and principals. The audit concluded that the training consisted largely of traditional workshop-based approaches with little evidence of changed teaching practices upon return to the classroom. It also concluded that that there was little coordination between agencies resulting in a degree of confusion among the trainers, usually the same people drawn from the PESs and DEBs (Willsher, 2008). The major report *Teaching in Lao PDR* (Beneviste, *et al*., 2008) that was published in the same year as the audit reached similar conclusions and affirmed TESAP's focus of working with all stakeholders to develop a system that allows teachers to obtain official recognition for the completion of any in-service training courses.

App 2.4 Educational Reform

After a period of relative isolation, Lao educators in attendance at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) began the process of re-engagement with educational ideas circulating among the agencies of the United Nations and the western donor countries (Lachanthaboun *et al*., 2005). In 2000, the Government released its *Education Strategic Vision up to the year 2020* (MoE, 2000) and committed itself to working to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals. This vision has served as the underlying framework for a dialogue with a range of donors about the way to develop the country's human resources. The outcome has been that over the last decade in particular there has been a concerted effort by the government to address the challenge of improving both universal access to basic education and the quality of education at all levels.

[20] The study titled, *Professional Development Networks Including Isolated Schools* focused on the need to establish networks and a system of professional support (TEADC, 2006b).

In 2006, the Eighth Party Congress announced that educational quality and standards needed to improve if Laos was going to meet the goals it had set for its education system through the EFA process. Later the same year, the Government released its National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS) (MoE, 2006b) and a year later the Education Law was revised, significant changes were announced regarding the extension of schooling and government expenditure on education increased. Changes to the Education Law coincided with the operationalisation of the NESRS and the release of the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) for 2009-2015 (MoE, 2009a). With the publication of the ESDF, the Government indicated its intention to take on a more active role in leading donor coordination. It established joint 'government' - 'development partner' educational sector working groups to assist with the implementation of the policies and strategies set out in the ESDF and to improve coordination of donors and the effectiveness of international aid.

The policies and strategies contained within the framework provided the foundation for the Government of Lao's successful application for funds from the Fast Track Initiative (FTI)[21]. The three-year round of funding obtained through the FTI provides Laos with an increased resource base to help it meet its commitment towards the Education for All and Millennium Development goals. The reliance on Official Development Assistance (ODA) to support reform initiatives remains a constant feature of the educational landscape in Laos. Kittiphanh (2011) comments that "*with foreign aid accounting for more than two thirds of public investment in sectors like health, education, agriculture and transport, delivering aid effectively and efficiently is vitally important to development success and the future of Lao PDR"* (p. 14). Others put forward the argument that with such substantial dependency, *"the national ownership and independence of the education development policy is at risk when external financing agencies provide substantial support in accordance with their own explicit aid agendas*" (Noonan, Phommalangsy & Phetsiriseng, 2013, p.128).

One major reform area, identified by the UN agencies as critical to improving educational quality, is that of teacher education (UNESCO, 2004, p. 161). With financial support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and from ADB, the Ministry of Education, in 2006, developed its *Teacher Education Strategy (2006-2015) and Action Plan (2006-2010)* [TESAP] (MoE, 2006a). Later, key elements of TESAP were incorporated into the ESDF and into the Ministry's new *Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan (2011-2015)* (MoES, 2011b). As outlined in the 2006 TESAP, the goal of

[21] See <http://www.globalpartnership.org>

reforming teacher education was to "*provide a better quality of education*" and this would be achieved through five strategies: (i) improved policy analysis; (ii) better management; (iii) improved teacher education methodology; (iv) continuous professional development; and, (v) improved salaries (MoE, 2006a, pp.5-8). Policy analysis, educational management, the curriculum and the status of teachers were all areas addressed through components of the Second Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP II) (ADB, 2011).

The focus on improving quality also resulted in Quality Indicators being drawn up in several areas to set standards for the improvement of schools and teaching.[22] However, the standards and indicators used are themselves quite variable with the criteria for the award of Model Village School being little more than a checklist of the ideal.[23] For example, Criterion 2 reads: "*School is safe and hygienic including a toilet, shade trees, a flag, a fence, and school sign"* and Criterion 4: *"All teachers have to have good morality – and respect the government."*

On the other hand the Education Quality Standards (MoES, 2011c) developed within the MoE with assistance from UNICEF, is a serious attempt to provide guidance to teachers and schools seeking to bring about improved practices. In 2010, a decree from the MoE instructed all PESs, DEBs, schools and VEDCs to implement these standards. They comprise 42 indicators and cover six broad areas: (i) students; (ii) teaching and learning; (iii) school environment; (iv) teaching and learning materials; (v) school management; and, (vi) community participation. The decree has been followed up with a set of guidelines for implementation (MoE, 2010a) and an extensive program of workshops aimed at familiarising DEB and school staff with implementation processes.

Another set of standards is focused on the capacity of teachers. In 2007 the DTE published a set of 30 teacher competencies designed to clarify the knowledge, skills and attitudes which teachers would be required to demonstrate upon graduation. They also gave direction to the longer-term professional development needs of teachers. Although this National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NCTC) has been published (MoE, 2007a), Kittiphanh (2011) makes the point that it is yet to be formally implemented and that this may account for what seems like a general lack of awareness by many teachers of the competencies.

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[22] Quality Indicators have been constructed for: The Model School Award; Quality Education Standards; The National Charter of Teacher Competencies; and, Teacher Awards and Honorific Titles.

[23] See Ministerial Directive No 763/MOE.DGE/07, 10 Sep 2007.

A fourth set of standards developed by the Department of Personnel (DoP) is centred on teachers' awards and honorific titles.[24] By comparison with the NCTC, these criteria appear to be relatively well known in schools after dissemination by the MoE to the school system through the PESs and DEBs. The standards are designed so that honorific titles can be awarded to teachers who demonstrate a particular level of expertise. They are also intended to be used to assess teachers for the purpose of promotion, which, it is planned, will be linked to salary increases.[25] The criteria for assessment includes performance, attitudes and values, qualification, teaching experience, and academic output[26]; however, as Kittiphanh (2011) argues, the challenge is to integrate these criteria with the national competencies so as to reduce confusion.

It is evident that over the last decade the focus on education as a means for developing the country's human resources has intensified. Listed below is a selection of educational policy and planning documents that have contributed to the goal of reforming education and improving access and quality over the past decade. The development of various sets of standards, has been one means by which the government has attempted to improve educational quality. Other initiatives have included improving physical infrastructure, increasing the availability of resources (such as textbooks) and revising school and teacher training curricula (ADB, 2011). However, one of the most important developments has been the increased level of coordination between government departments and donor agencies working on various aspects of educational reform. This increased coordination enables limited resources to be more efficiently and effectively managed.

App 2.5 Final Comments

An ongoing challenge for the Lao Government is to be able to respond adequately to the educational needs of its dispersed population. While MoES statistics show that net enrolment rates are increasing and drop-out rates decreasing there is still a significant proportion of students failing to complete primary school.[27] Improving access, retention and the quality of teaching remain key goals of educational reform. No longer isolated as it was twenty years ago, Laos is today situated to benefit from its membership within ASEAN and from its contacts within the international educational community. The current generation of political, administrative and professional leaders possess a range of experiences shaped by influences

[24] The list of teacher honorific titles are set out in the Prime Ministerial Decree No 208/PM (30 July 2007).
[25] This decision was announced by the Vice-Minister of Education and reported in the Vientiane Times, 31st August 2012.
[26] These criteria are set out in the *National Teacher Awards Criteria for Academic Teachers* (MoE, 2008b).
[27] See net enrolment rates and drop-out rates published in the Annual Bulletin (MoE, 2009b; MoES, 2012).

stemming from colonisation, socialist ideology, and western democratic traditions. The policy statements and strategies outlined above indicate that a diverse group of stakeholders have reached agreement on the general direction for educational reform in Laos. The task now is to ensure that the educational reform process now fosters within Laos a sense of ownership, the building of collaborative relationships and the development of local capacity.

A Selection of Significant Educational Policy and Planning Documents 2000-2011

2000	*The Education Strategic Vision up to the Year 2020*	(MoE, 2000)
2004	*National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy*	(GoL, 2004)
2005	*Education for All: National Plan of Action (2003-2015)*	(MoE, 2005b)
2006	*Teacher Education Strategy 2006-2015 and Action Plan (2006-2010)*	(MoE, 2006a)
2006	*National Education Sector Reform Strategy (2006-2015)*	(MoE, 2006b)
2006	*6th National Social and Economic Development Plan (2006-2010)*	(GoL, 2006a)
2007	*Education Law* (revised)	(GoL, 2007)
2007	*National Charter of Teacher Competencies*	(MoE, 2007a)
2008	*National Teacher Awards Criteria for Academic Teachers*	(MoE, 2008b)
2008	*Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment*	(MoE, 2008e)
2009	*Education Sector Development Framework (2009-2015)*	(MoE, 2009a)
2011	*7th National Social and Economic Development Plan (2011-2015)*	(GoL, 2011)
2011	*Education Sector Development Plan (2011-2015)*	(MoES, 2011a)
2011	*Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan (2011-2015)*	(MoES, 2011b)
2011	*Education Quality Standards*	(MoES, 2011c)

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Project Title: **STARTING OUT IN VILLAGE SCHOOLS: LEARNING TO TEACH IN LAO PDR**	
Name of participant:	Phone:
Name of investigator: **Michele Willsher**	Phone:

1. I have received a statement explaining the survey and interviews involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which, including details of the survey and interviews have been explained to me.
3. I authorise the investigator or her assistant to interview me or administer a survey
4. I give my permission to be audio taped/photographed ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. I give my permission for my name or identity to be used ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. I acknowledge that:

   a) Having read the Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.

   b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

   c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me. The privacy of the information I provide will be safeguarded. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law. If I participate in a focus group I understand that while all participants will be asked to keep the conversation confidential, the researcher cannot guarantee that other participants will do this.

   d) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study will be used for: A thesis which will be provided to RMIT University and possible journal articles and conference papers may be published. Any information which may be used to identify me will not be used unless I have given my permission (see point 5).

Participant's Consent

Name: _____ Date: _____
(Participant)

Name: _____ Date: _____
(Witness to signature)

Appendix 4: School Visits Schedule

Schedule of School Visits							
Year	**Month**	**Week**	**Week Starting Mon**	**School 1**	**School 2**	**School 3**	**School 4**
2009	Sep	1	31/08/2009	**Introductory Visits to 4 Schools**			
		2	07/09/2009				
		3	14/09/2009				
		4	21/09/2009				
		5	28/09/2009	**Visit 1**			
	Oct	6	05/10/2009		**Visit 1**		
		7	12/10/2009			**Visit 1**	
		8	19/10/2009				**Visit 1**
		9	26/10/2009				
	Nov	10	02/11/2009				
		11	09/11/2009				
		12	16/11/2009	**Visit 2**			
		13	23/11/2009		**Visit 2**		
	Dec	14	30/11/2009			**Visit 2**	
		15	07/12/2009				**Visit 2**
		16	14/12/2009				
		17	21/12/2009				
		18	29/12/2009				
2010	Jan	19	04/01/2010				
		20	11/01/2010				
		21	18/01/2010				
		22	25/01/2010	**MID YEAR SCHOOL BREAK**			
	Feb	23	01/02/2010	**Visit 3**			
		24	08/02/2010		**Visit 3**		
		25	15/02/2010			**Visit 3**	
		26	22/02/2010				**Visit 3**
	Mar	27	01/03/2010				
		28	08/03/2010				
		29	15/03/2010				
		30	22/03/2010				
		31	29/03/2010				
	Apr	32	05/04/2010				
		33	12/04/2010	**LAO NEW YEAR**			
		34	19/04/2010	**Visit 4**			
		35	26/04/2010		**Visit 4**		
	May	36	03/05/2010			**Visit 4**	
		37	10/05/2010				**Visit 4**
		38	17/05/2010				
		39	24/05/2010				
		40	31/05/2010	**Final 1 Day Meetings with each of the Four Teachers**			

Appendix 5: Ministerial Authorisation for Research

ສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນລາວ
ສັນຕິພາບ ເອກະລາດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ເອກະພາບ ວັດທະນະຖາວອນ
***** (()) *****

ກະຊວງສຶກສາທິການ ເລກທີ 160 /ສສ.ສຄ/2009
ນະຄອນຫຼວງວຽງຈັນ, ວັນທີ 24 FEB 2009

ໜັງສືອະນຸຍາດ

ອີງຕາມ: ດຳລັດຂອງນາຍົກລັດຖະມົນຕີສະບັບເລກທີ 62/ນຍ, ລົງວັນທີ 07 ເມສາ 2008 ວ່າດ້ວຍ ການຈັດຕັ້ງ ແລະ ການເຄື່ອນໄຫວຂອງກະຊວງສຶກສາທິການ .

ອີງຕາມ: ການສະເໜີຂອງມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລ RMIT University ກ່ຽວກັບການສະເໜີຂອງ ນາງ ມິແຊວ ວິນເຊີ ແລະ ຄຳສະເໜີຂອງກົມສ້າງຄູ.

ລັດຖະມົນຕີວ່າການ ກະຊວງສຶກສາທິການ ຈຶ່ງເຫັນດີ :

ມາດຕາ1: ອະນຸຍາດໃຫ້ ນາງ ມິແຊວ ວິນເຊີ (Michele willser) ນັກຄົ້ນຄ້ວາປະລິນຍາເອກຈາກ RMIT University Melbourne Australia ລົງເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນການຄົ້ນຄ້ວາຢູ່ ແຂວງ ຈຳປາສັກ ແລະ ວິທະຍາໄລຄູປາກເຊ.

ມາດຕາ2: ມອບໃຫ້ພະແນກສຶກສາປະຈຳແຂວງຈຳປາສັກ ແລະ ວິທະຍາໄລຄູປາກເຊໃຫ້ການຮ່ວມມືກັບ ຜູ້ກ່ຽວໃນການຄັດເລືອກເປົ້າໝາຍໂຮງຮຽນ ແລະ ນັກຮຽນຄູເພື່ອໃຫ້ຂໍ້ມູນໃນການສຳພາດ.

ມາດຕາ3: ໜັງສືອະນຸຍາດສະບັບນີ້ມີຜົນສັກສິດນັບແຕ່ມື້ລົງລາຍເຊັນນີ້ເປັນຕົ້ນໄປ.

ລັດຖະມົນຕີວ່າການກະຊວງສຶກສາທິການ

ສ. ເກດສະໝອນ ຫຼ້າຈັນທະບູນ

ບ່ອນສົ່ງ :
- ຫ້ອງການກະຊວງ 1 ສະບັບ
- ກົມສ້າງຄູ 1 ສະບັບ
- ພະແນກສຶກສາປະຈຳແຂວງຈຳປາສັກ 1 ສະບັບ
- ວິທະຍາໄລຄູປາກເຊ 1 ສະບັບ
- ເກັບມ້ຽນ 1 ສະບັບ

Translation of Authorisation Form:

Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

Ministry of Education

Number 160/2009
Vientiane Capital, 24 February 2009

Permission

In accordance with the Prime Minister's decree 62/PM Office, 7 April 2008, referring to the organisation and terms of reference of the Ministry of Education.

Based on the research proposal of Ms Michele Willsher, PhD student at RMIT University, Australia and the subsequent response to that proposal by the Department of Teacher Education.

The Minister of Education agrees as follows:

Article 1: Permission is granted for Ms Michele Willsher, PhD student at RMIT University, Australia to conduct data collection in Champassak Province and in the Pakse Teacher Training College;

Article 2: The Champassak Provincial Education Service and the Pakse Teacher Training College are asked to cooperate with the researcher and facilitate her work including the selection of target schools and teacher trainees for the purpose of carrying out the research and interviews;

Article 3: This permission will come into force from the date on which it is signed.

On Behalf of the Minister of Education

Mrs Sengdueane Lachanthaboune
Vice-Minister of Education

One copy to each of:
- Ministry of Education Cabinet
- Teacher Training Department, Champassak
- Champassak PES
- Pakse Teacher Training College
- Filing

Appendix 6: Example of Journal Notes

03.12.09		
3pm	School finishes early so Miss T suggests we go to visit her parents in the fields where they are still harvesting rice. During this time of year (during the harvest season), the parents sleep in the *'tiang nar'* or field house – and the rest of the time they live in the village. Some families use their field houses for longer using them in the daytime when they are sowing and harvesting vegetables during the dry season from (November to March) and returning to their villages during the months of January to May. Her parents tell me how the rice cycle starts in June with the seedlings being planted – these are then transferred to the fields in July when their planting starts. Rice grows between 3-4 months depending on the variety and then is harvested October – November depending on the weather. Once rice is harvested vegetable planting starts using the river to water the vegetables. In the house on stilts surrounded by the recently harvested rice fields I am treated to fresh rice noodles. In the shade of tall trees and groves of bamboo the women in the family have soaked the rice for about 3 days have then pounded it and then kept it in a sack for one day, then it is steamed. Once it is steamed, it is pounded again and then it is mixed with water until it is smooth and made into a thick paste. Then after making a fire they have boiled a large pot of water. Standing over the pot of boiling water it takes two women to fill the sieve '*pheun*' and then to squeeze it so that the noodles fall evenly into the swirling water where it cooks instantly. Another woman with a bamboo sieve scoops up the noodles as they float to the surface and dunks them in water drawn from the stream to cool… After draining it is folded into serving sizes and placed into a bowl where lime, sugar, chilli, fish sauce and herbs are added. Children and women are gathered around all eager to eat – the men are at the stream chopping bamboo, which I am told they will sell for 3,000 kip a piece. It seems like back breaking work for such a small amount of money. We walk back on dusk and the three of us decide to wash outside while it is still warm in the 'washing area' which is located next to the household well. We walk past a large log that Ms T's father found floating down the flooded river and dragged it up onto the bank- he would like to sell it for around 300,000 kip but has agreed to sell it to a family friend for only 200,000 kip - much less that it is worth.	Village life Farming Earning cash
	When we get back home, Miss T spends another hour hoeing the home garden and plants herb cuttings collected from the fields near the river. At 5.30 it is dark – her mother still hasn't returned from the fields and Miss T has started to cook sticky rice which is the main staple in this village. The new teacher tells me this year her family harvested 170 sacks of rice – some small 20 kg others 40 kg, nearly all will be kept to feed the family for the year – only a few will be sold. Miss T tells me she is still waiting for permanency and how this will at least bring in a regular supply of cash into her family. Teaching is but one side of this teacher's life. Permanency means she will add financial security to the family.	Family income
Evening 8.00pm	We visit the temple – it is a full moon – and wait for the monks to lead the candle light procession around the three stupas...	Religious festivals

Appendix 7: Example of Running Record

World Around Us: Lesson No 33 - Magnets (Seng, Visit 4, 12.05.10)	
9.10	Miss Seng has brought a small magnet, some metal pins, paper and wood to class and set them on the table in front of the room. (In front of the class, she demonstrates how magnets can pick up different objects through a piece of glass.)
9.23	After 13 minutes of talking and demonstrating and making the students watch and listen, she writes the lesson on the board "Lesson No 33: Magnets". She continues to demonstrate for another 9 minutes - talking and explaining about which objects the magnets will move. Many students are not listening and appeared bored. Some have already started copying the lesson from the textbook into their notebooks – others are reading other lessons from the same text book.
9.38	After 28 minutes Miss Seng tells everyone to "hurry up and copy".
9.50	Students are allowed outside to have a break.
10.20	The same lesson continues. Miss Seng asks the Ss some oral questions and then writes two questions on the board and asks Ss to write the answers. The teacher sits down at her desk and marks earlier work: 1. What can magnets attach to? 2. What are the characteristics of magnets? (*these questions are from the book*)
10.35	Miss Seng gets up and walks around the class checking that students are copying. T - asks one student to answer and then scribes the answer on the board – (the teacher's writing is hard to read as she writes quickly) Ss who can't write the answers themselves are told to look at the board. (Unfortunately many Ss cannot read the teachers' handwriting - so it is difficult to copy) The weaker students don't pay attention and so long as they keep quiet are ignored. Another student is asked to come to the board and writes the answer to question 2 T- then asks some other students to answer and scribes their comments. T- after writing the answers on the board the T tells the students that she wants to collect the papers but most of the Ss tell her that they want more time to copy down the answers. T - says *"no I want to see what you can do yourselves!"* T - then collects each student's paper Teacher tells them to get out their maths books while she stands in class correcting and giving a mark to each paper.
10.50	Everyone seems tired but the teacher is determined to move immediately onto a maths lesson.
Post lesson Comment	After the next maths lesson the teacher tells me that she doesn't think that the lesson was very good – I ask for her reasons. She says its because not many students were involved. She admits that she finds it too hard to give them materials to touch as when she does they don't listen to her, therefore it's easier just to talk to them, demonstrate and make them listen.

Appendix 8: Interview Schedule: TTC Lecturers

Interview questions for TTC lecturers

Number of years teaching at the TTC: _____

Subject (s) Currently Teaching: _____

1. Where does the course teach trainee-teachers about a learner-centred approach to teaching?

2. In which subjects does the course teach trainee-teachers to modify the textbook?
   (e.g. Asking questions linked to students' real life, etc.)

3. Where does the course teach trainee-teachers how to teach children of different abilities?

4. In which subjects, does the course teach trainee-teachers about what to do with the rest of the class when one or two students are called to the board to do work?

5. In which subjects does the course teach trainee-teachers how to manage student behaviour?

6. Is the Five Pointed Star mentioned in any of the course textbooks? Where?

7. Are the trainee-teachers shown the teaching competencies? In which subject(s)? When?

8. How many days do trainee-teachers observe and teach during school visits and practicum?

9. Did you observe any primary school lessons with your students or analyse any classroom lessons with the students? How often? In which subjects?

10. What do you think are the strengths of the course?

11. What are the limitations of the course?

12. How could the course be improved?

Appendix 9: Interview Schedule: Cooperating Teachers

Interview questions for cooperating teachers during practicum

1. How many years have you been a primary school teacher?
2. How many years have you helped support trainee-teachers from the TTC?
3. What kind of help have you given the trainee-teacher who is on your class this week?
4. While on practicum what do you think helps the trainees the most to learn about teaching?
5. If this is the first day with the trainee-teacher then, what kind of help did you give the trainee-teacher who was with your class last week?
6. When do you usually give advice? And how?
7. Let's talk about the lesson that was videoed today. What suggestions did you make when the trainee-teacher showed you his/her lesson plan? What kind of feedback could you give him/her now you have seen the lesson?
8. What do you think are the trainee-teacher's strengths? And weaknesses?
9. This trainee has two more months back in his/her course. Do you have any suggestions as to what this trainee-teacher should learn more about?
10. Are there any benefits for you as a cooperating teacher in having trainee-teachers in your class?
11. Do you have any ideas on how practicum be organised? Can you please describe them?

Appendix 10: Interview Schedule: Trainee-Teachers: Post Practicum

Observing the cooperating teachers

1. During the first week of practicum how many days did you observe?
2. How many lessons did you observe during your whole practicum?
3. Did the cooperating teacher in Week 1 teach normal lessons, or did the cooperating teacher prepare special lessons to show you?
4. How often did you observe cooperating teachers using teaching aids?
   Give an example of a teaching aid and how you saw it being used.
5. How often did you observe cooperating teachers using group or pair work?
   Can you give an example?
6. How often did you observe cooperating teachers using games to teach?
   Can you give an example?
7. Describe something you learnt from watching a cooperating teacher.
8. What would you have liked to have observed more of from the cooperating teachers?
9. Did you find it of value to observe the cooperating teachers? Can you describe a little about what you found was useful from observing the cooperating teachers.

Teaching and being observed on practicum

10. How many lessons did you teach during your practicum?
11. For each of the weeks, generally where was the cooperating teacher when you taught your lessons?
    (e.g. in the room/outside/staffroom)

Week 1	Week 2
Week 3	Week 4
Week 5	Week 6

12. How many lesson plans did your cooperating teachers comment on?
13. What kinds of suggestions about your lesson plans did the cooperating teachers give you?
14. What kinds of comments about your teaching did the cooperating teachers give you?
15. How did the teachers normally provide you with feedback? *(written? oral? immediately after lesson?)*
16. Was there anything the cooperating teachers told you to do that was different from what the lecturers at the TTC told you? If your answer is "yes", talk about what was different.

Types of assistance

17. Who helped you on practicum? Describe all the ways these person(s) helped you?
18. Who helped you the most?
19. What else helped you to learn about teaching on practicum?
20. What were the two main ways you learnt while you were on practicum?
21. How could the cooperating teachers have helped you more on practicum?

Teaching in the classroom

22. What did you think when you saw yourself on the video teaching a lesson?
23. Was the videoed lesson any different from other lessons you taught on practicum?
    If your answer is "yes", talk about what was different
24. Why did you decide to teach this lesson for the video?
25. In what ways was the school you taught in like the one where you went to school?
    (you can talk about teachers, lessons, buildings, children, textbooks or anything else)
26. In what ways was the school you taught in different from the one where you went to school?
    (you can talk about teachers, lessons, buildings, children, textbooks or anything else)
27. After the one-week practicum many trainee-teachers said that they were surprised that the children were naughty. Talk about why you think students sometimes misbehave.
28. Overall how did you find the experience of practicum? Why?

The future

29. What do you want to learn more about in the rest of your course?
30. What is something that you have seen during practicum that you will do in your own classroom?
31. What is something that you have seen during practicum that you will try to avoid in your own classroom?
32. What do you think will be the hardest thing for you to do when you start teaching?
33. In your view, what can be done to make practicum more effective?

Appendix 11: Practicum Journal Schedule: Four Questions

Questions for practicum journal*
1. What are some things that you learnt about teaching?
2. What are some things that you did on practicum that you are pleased about?
3. What was something that was difficult for you to do?
4. Who helped you? How did they help you?

** These four journal questions are to be completed each of the six weeks of practicum*

Appendix 12: Interview Schedule: Final Interview: Trainee-Teachers

Questions for Final Interviews with Trainee-Teachers

General

1. Overall what was the most useful component of your training program? Why?

Practicum revisited

2. What about your practicum experience - what was useful?
3. Did practicum meet your expectations? Why?
4. What did you think about working with five different teachers?
   Did they have different expectations or were they similar in what they expected of you?
5. Did you watch the video? Who else watched it?
6. What did you think about being videoed? What did you learn from watching it?
7. What kind of assistance do you think helps you to learn about teaching?
8. How important was it to get on with your cooperating teacher?

The course

9. What do you think were the most useful subjects in your pre-service course?
10. What would you have liked your course to have spent more time on?
11. Have you seen the list of the National Teacher Training Competencies? Where?

Teaching students

12. Finish this sentence. To help children to understand a lesson a teacher needs to……
13. What are the main things students need to learn at school?
14. What are the best ways to teach this? (What helps students to learn?)
15. What are the qualities of a 'good' teacher?
16. What can the teacher do to create a good learning environment in the classroom?

Next year

17. What do you think you will do next year?
18. Where would you prefer to teach – in your own village or somewhere else?
19. What class would you most like to teach next year? Why?
20. Among all of your responsibilities, which ones do you think will be the easiest to do? Why?
21. Among all of your responsibilities, which ones do you think will be the most difficult?
22. What areas do you think you need more training in?
23. How do you think you will learn about teaching in your first year of teaching?
24. What kind of teacher do you think you will be?
25. Where do you think you will be in five years from now?

Appendix 13: Survey 1 Schedule: Trainee-Teachers

SURVEY 1

1. What kind of support are you receiving to do this course at the TTC?

Government Scholarship	☐
Other scholarship	☐
Family Support	☐
Other (please describe)	☐

2. Who made the decision to study at the Pakse Teachers College? (e.g. Parents / Self / Other)

3. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

3. Did your parents support your choice?

4. Who or what has influenced you to become a teacher? In what way(s)?

5. Can you remember a good teacher who taught you at primary school or high school?
Can you describe why you consider him/her a "good teacher"?

6. What strategies did teachers use to teach you when you were at school:

6.1 Explaining at the blackboard	never ☐	rarely ☐	sometimes ☐	often ☐
6.2 Copying from board/textbooks	never ☐	rarely ☐	sometimes ☐	often ☐
6.3 Using teaching aids to explain	never ☐	rarely ☐	sometimes ☐	often ☐
6.4 Group work	never ☐	rarely ☐	sometimes ☐	often ☐

7. What other kinds of strategies did teachers use when you were in primary school?

8. Which subjects or topics within the course do you find most useful for teaching? Why?

9. What things apart from what is in your existing course do you think your course should help you learn before you start your job as a teacher?

10. What are the main tasks of a teacher?

11. Which specific tasks do you think you will be good at?

12. Complete this sentence. I think a good teacher is someone who .....

13. What might be difficult when you think about starting work as a teacher?

13. What strategies can you use to help you solve your difficulties?

14. What would you like to see yourself doing in 5 years time?

Appendix 14: Focus Group Discussion Schedule: Trainee-Teachers

Focus group discussion topics with trainee-teachers

Firstly, introduce Sivilay and myself.
Then explain to the group that this is a chance for them to share their ideas about themselves and their ideas about teaching and to elaborate on some of the answers which they gave in the survey.

Introductions
Invite all students to introduce themselves so as to make them relax, ask them some general questions and go around the group encouraging each person to respond.

1. Where are you from?

2. How many people in your family?

3. What is something that you like doing in your free time?

4. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

Talking about school visits
I understand that you all recently went on school visits for a week to learn about teaching. So from what you observed ...

5. What did you do during this time?

6. Did anything surprise you?

7. What do you think is the hardest things for teachers to do when they are teaching children?

Talking about the course

8. If you don't understand something in class that the lecturers talk about, what do you do?

9. What would you like to learn more about in the course work?

Forthcoming practicum
As we understand, you will all go on practicum for six weeks ...

10. What do you expect will be the most difficult thing for you to do on practicum?

11. What do you most hope to learn about during this time?

Appendix 15: Data Analysis: Categories and Codes for Interviews and Observations

Descriptive codes used for analysing interviews with beginning teachers	
Categories	**Codes**
Achievements	Administration duties Involvement in school events Participating in village activities Teaching Children learning Other
Difficulties	Teaching reading Teaching mathematics Using learner-centred methods Managing behaviour Getting through the textbook Calculating monthly results
Surprises	Level of students Other teachers' behaviour Children's learning Lack of assistance
Learning	About administration How to manage behaviour Ways to help students How to use the textbook Other
Assistance	Giving moral support Advice about administration Advice about textbook lessons Advice about managing students Other assistance No assistance
Communication with others about teaching	Other staff Students' parents Village members Principal Friends Own parents Staff from other schools
Perceptions of others	Other teachers Students Community members DEB Staff
Advice for others	Pre-service program In-service training
Beginning teacher involvement in the research	Attitudes to research Attitude to being videoed

Descriptive codes used for analysing observations of beginning teachers	
Categories	**Codes**
Administrative tasks	Planning Reporting
Classroom management	Commanding attention Disciplining Monitoring students Seating students
Lesson preparation	Lesson preparation
Teaching	Explaining Doing board work Organising group work Linking text to real life Using activities Questioning Engaging with students Scribing on board Concrete materials and teaching aids Reviewing lessons
Student behaviour	Copying Reciting At the board Waiting Active participation
Student Abilities	Weak students Strong students
Outside-classroom activities	Sport Teaching dance Young pioneers Gardening or repairing fences Assembly Other
Homework	Types of homework tasks Setting and returning homework
Assessment	Marking students' work Marking system Testing
Communication	Communication with other classes Communication with parents Communication with DEB
Interactions with other classes	Teacher absent Teaching sport and dance
Ceremonies and celebrations	Village festivals Religious festivals
Home life	House work Farm work Social life

Appendix 16: Example of Transcription of Interviews

Data Type	Transcription of Interview: Bounyang: Visit 3	References to other data sources
Journal Notes Week 20	**Bounyang reads out his journal:** *I feel pleased about my teaching because I have changed the students seating by mixing weak and slow students together – so that the weak students observe the stronger students reading and writing and the stronger students help the weaker students so they will have more experience. I am happy to find out a way to help all students to learn.*	**Observations** From observations in week 23 the grouping appears to have changed so I take the opportunity during the interview to inquire
Interview 1 Visit 3 Week 23	**Q. Why did you do this? The weak and strong students together?** *I learnt that from the TTC lecturers – they told us to mix the abilities together. I thought it would help them and it did but only up to a point.*	
	Q. So can you tell me, this morning in the mathematics lesson how were the groups organised? *I am sitting them in ability groups - separating the slower students from the stronger ones - I thought about it myself. I also made the groups smaller, putting 6 students in the group with the head of the group sitting in the middle.* **Q. When did you start doing this?** *Since about two weeks ago until now I have used the same groups and so when I tell them to get into groups they can remember where to go and sit. All the children are now sitting in the middle row are the weaker students.* **Q What do you mean by 'weak'?** *For Lao and Maths subjects – for Lao lessons I meant those students who cannot write the letters properly and for maths lessons those who can't do the calculations.*	**Observations** Refer to lesson this morning
	Q. So this means that you have changed in the last few weeks since writing the journal? *Yes*	**Journals** Refer to Journal Week 20
	Q. Earlier in the year I did not notice you grouping them according to their abilities how did you organise them then? *No earlier on, I chose the best students and then put some weak students in each group so I mixed weak and strong students but mainly focused on mixing children from different families together?* **Q. Why did you do that?** *Because I wanted them to talk with others not just to their brothers and sisters so that they can communicate with other students not just their family. Sometimes brothers, sisters and cousins, always wanted to sit together and then they didn't talk to other students outside of their family so I thought that it was a good idea to separate the family members from each other so that they had to talk to each other.*	**Observations** Refer to observations made in Week 7

Appendix 17: Interview Comparison Analysis: Example of Matrix

Matrix of comments by Bounyang on the topic 'assistance from others'			
Visit 1	**Visit 2**	**Visit 3**	**Visit 4**
The other teachers helped me to make a longer plan for the month. I asked the Grade 2 teacher as she taught Grade 1 last year for help. I also had to make a yearly plan - this is attached on the wall in the office. I used this to make my monthly plan. ..... *I didn't ask for help about how to teach, but when I was working in the classroom Miss S came into the class to advise me on how to read to the students as she had heard me reading through the walls and thought I was not pronouncing some words properly.* ..... *The Principal only came to observe me once that was on Monday when you came to observe. Afterwards he gave me some advice about my groups and making the children sit closer together. That's been the only time he has seen me teaching or given me advice.* ..... *I received some advice about how to do yearly plans, and monthly reports but mostly I was on my own.* ..... *The Grade 2 teacher is on maternity leave and won't come back till next semester.*	*The last few weeks there have been lots of disturbances to the school and for the last two weeks I had to look after the whole school.* ..... Bounyang reported that he had not received any specific advice. (memo end of visit 2) ..... *Now I don't often ask questions to others, I just think about what I am doing and whether it can help students learn… I want to help them learn so I do what I think will help them. I don't often ask the others. That means I ask less questions than when I started teaching. At that time I needed to find out how to do everything required by the Principal.*	*The Principal lets us know if there are any notices from the DEB. There are no regular meetings but sometimes every two weeks it depends on any announcements he has to tell us.* ..... *The Principal just talked to me about my teaching in general – not focused on anything specific. He told me to do more group work in the classroom and to make students do more activities. He didn't tell me how. I think that's because the DEB told him to do that.* ..... *The Grade 3 teacher just helped me do the student learning results not about teaching… but the Grade 2 teacher mainly suggests how to use the textbook because she taught Grade 1 before* ..... *When I have a problem I go directly to her and ask her if she can help, like with a lesson in the textbook. But she doesn't teach using any new methods, most of the time she lets the students copy from the board* ..... *Those two teachers don't volunteer any advice but they give suggestions on the textbook if I ask them.*	*The Village Committee gave me 150,000 kip a month for each of the nine months I taught this year. They also gave us rice ... about 33 kg of rice each semester. For the first two months they didn't give anything and then in November they paid me for the first two months.* ..... *No one really gives me advice as I know how to do everything at the school now, like do the monthly reports and plan.* ..... *I have heard from the Principal here and also from the one when I did my practicum that we have to focus on the strong students and forget about the weak students. But I don't think that is right – we have to worry about these weak students because they are still weak we can't just leave them we have to help them to be able to write.*

Appendix 18: Beginning Teachers' Handbook: Contents Page